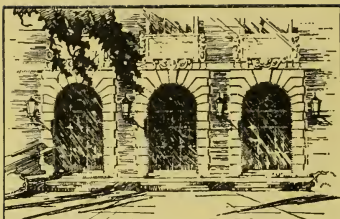


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INGELHEIM

Physician. Time is a skilful weaver, but there is a saying your Majesty may have heard, that he does not work until we have ceased to watch him.

Queen. True, and yet let him work as skilfully as may be, he does, at the best, but put a patch into our torn raiment. The thorns and briars of the world have done their evil work: he cannot make whole again, he can only disguise; the rent remains for all his workmanship.

Physician. Alas! your Majesty, the hour soon comes in which we realise that we cannot find our way through the world with untorn garments, and so learn to be grateful even for the patches of the great weaver."—FROM THE COURT PHYSICIAN.

I N G E L H E I M

BY THE
AUTHOR OF 'MISS MOLLY'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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I N G E L H E I M.

CHAPTER XVII.

“A youth to whom was given,
So much of earth, so much of heaven,
And such impetuous blood.”

THROUGH the cool darkened conservatory, between the faintly scented flowers, Dorislaus Lescynski followed the “Grey Lady,” until at length she paused where a glass door gave a glimpse of the moonlit garden and dark waters of the lake. She did not turn towards him, but remained with her face directed towards the prospect without, and thus waited, as if for him to speak.

The silence, after the noise and excitement of the other rooms, the heavy scent of the flowers, seemed affecting his brain; the previous agitation, culminating in this interview, made him feel for the moment physically weak. Not a single doubt crossed his mind; once on the track, the gossip of

the ballroom had made him sure, and now on her presence here, incredible as it appeared, he could put but one interpretation—there was something she wished to say to him.

His voice sounded unsteady to himself as, “You forgive my being here?” he asked, and so saying he rested his hand against the door by which she stood, —the narrow iron ring was back in its place.

She did not reply to his question, but instead, “It would be better to bribe Fate with that,” she said in a low tone, “than to wear it here.”

The voice! the words! He took a step back, a sudden maddening fear assailing him, and with a quick movement, taking off his mask, “You recognise *me*, you say—who are you?”

She lifted her veil immediately. In the faint light he saw the smile he dreaded, the suggestion of amusement in Virginia’s cold eyes.

“This is premature,” she said; “unmasking is not *de rigueur* till midnight,—but so dramatic,” with a little laugh, “that it is a pity there was no one here to see and admire.”

The reaction had been so violent that at first he had been incapable of speech or thought, but her words gave him a moment in which to recover. “I am afraid,” he said, “that I am not in the mood to enjoy even such a successful effect, perhaps because of the risk I run for my share in it.”

She reddened ever so slightly, the insinuation in his words did not escape her.

“Fortunately, then, for you there were no spectators.” She scorned and disdained to notice the insinuation that there was a risk in her knowledge of his presence.

But, though annoyed at the sting in the words, the chief emotion she still felt was pleasurable excitement at the unexpected page she had turned to-night. Any realisation of the agony and despair of the man was utterly impossible to her; she could no more have realised his suffering than if it had been portrayed in a book, or played on a stage. It was all alike unreal.

If to some physical suffering in others is unrealisable, the sympathy expressed more for the person than the pain—to others, to those of Virginia Shore’s type, any comprehension of mental suffering is impossible. In her own case, emotional suffering would have been too closely allied to dramatic excitement to be pure pain. There was something of the privileged spectator at present in her mind, which found reflection in her eyes, and which killed, quicker than anything else could have done, the passion that had threatened to overmaster the man.

To hide what he felt, to prevent her having the gratification of seeing his suffering, was for the moment his only clear thought. After all, on such an occasion foolery was permissible, and that the foolery should be no play, but bitter earnest to him, was chiefly due to his own assumption of a false position.

Vaguely all this reasoning strove to force itself into his mind, for the time totally incapable of reasoning; but instinct is strong—at any moment standing here he might be recognised, and the construction put upon his presence lead to undesirable talk. And there were others to consider as well as himself.

In Virginia's heart was secret admiration for the daring of the deed. She, who would have calculated her actions so carefully, and had never known what it was to be carried away by passion past prudence, was stirred to admiration by the recklessness of such a proceeding. The courage of her own heart was able to recognise courage in others. If there had been no faint intangible jealousy, shadowy as a cloud, and unacknowledged, perhaps the admiration would have gained something that now it lacked.

She had discovered his mistake through his words, and in a second the truth had flashed upon her that, in following her, he had believed himself to be following the Princess. The recognition of this embittered her thoughts almost unconsciously,—never in her life had speech been so difficult. And whilst she hesitated, "His Excellency," she said in a low voice, and, dropping her veil, turned to meet him, with the idea of giving her companion a moment in which to recover himself. But disguise was out of the question; his mask lay on the floor, his hand with the betraying ring was distinctly visible.

"Miss Shore," the old man said, his voice grave

and unsuited to the occasion, but as he spoke his eyes strayed past her to the figure beyond, "it would be as well for you to return to the ballroom, the supper-room will be opened at once. Wait," just glancing towards her companion, "wait five minutes until I return."

It was in silence he took Virginia through the conservatory, only once he spoke. "You did not know of, or encourage this folly—worse than folly—insanity?"

"No, Excellency; however eccentric I may be, I should never recommend a man to cut the last rope which gave him a chance of reaching land again."

"But, having done so, you would not hesitate to watch the result?"

"A struggle for life or death is of interest and excitement to the whole world," she answered.

"Your philosophy, Miss Shore, is always a reproof to us all."

"A reproof, Excellency?"

"Oh, we all have vague ideas on the subject, but life prevents us carrying them out—whilst you——"

"You flatter," she returned, calmly. "No, I have got so far, that I have formulated a system of philosophy, and I hope to live long enough to perfect it; but I fear it is useless to hope to live long enough to try it."

"But we can judge by the first chapters. I am afraid, however, it is not a system likely to have

many successful followers. Here is Captain Shore ; you will allow me to confide you to his care, and let me suggest that *he* would be a good pupil."

"Why?" She had thrown back her veil, she lifted her eyes steadily at the question.

"It might smooth his path in life. To have too much heart is inconvenient."

"And you think my system would mitigate that evil?"

"I am sure it would make life easier," he said. "You can tell him," he added, "the secret that you have discovered—it would be as well."

"Am I the only discoverer?" she queried. She did not look up this time.

"Unfortunately not. The Princess recognised him."

"Unfortunate indeed," Virginia repeated.

"Yes," assented his Excellency, drily. "Uninvited guests are rarely welcome."

"It is generally presumed that they know that," the girl replied; "it seems a pity therefore to fight in a lost cause."

"There is a law, Miss Shore," his Excellency answered, quietly, "which I don't think you understand; that for those who once go down into the arena there is no retreat—the choice lies between victory and death."

"That may be, Excellency; the time for choosing, however, is beforehand, and the moral of your story is, avoid the arena."

"And what is your secret for that? Willingly or unwillingly, we all seem to arrive there at last."

"Except me." She laughed. "Events bore into me deeply for the moment, but my secret is, I believe, simply *un grand faculté pour l'oubli*."

"That places you at a great advantage with those who possess it not."

She did not answer his comment on her words, but took her brother's arm and hurried away with him.

"Did you know," she said, abruptly, "that Dorislaus Lescynski was here?"

"Here?" he repeated, stopping short. "What do you mean by *here*?"

"No, not there," and she laughed, "out yonder, wherever he has been lying in wait; but *here*, in this very house, which I need hardly tell you is extremely unwise of him."

"Wait, Virginia." Jerome's voice was full of anxiety. "Tell me what you mean; you have recognised him, I see. So much harm might come of it that I must go to him. Where did you see him? Are you sure?"

"I last saw him standing in the conservatory, having taken off his mask, so you can believe there was not much doubt."

"He is mad."

"Possibly; but the lesson is, don't constitute yourself the guardian of madmen—you are not fitted for the post."

She spoke quietly, and Jerome's voice sounded very anxious and worried after hers.

"Well, I shall go to him; he must be made to listen to reason—and go. It is always possible some one else might recognise him, and if so, it might come to the knowledge of the Princess."

"Too late. The Princess has already recognised him."

"What did she say, or do?"

"When his Excellency left me he was returning to him, commissioned with her message; he probably knows it by now."

When Virginia spoke in those tones Jerome knew it was useless to attempt to reason her into a fresh attitude of mind. He was conscious of their divided sympathies in some slight measure, and thought it might be attributable in a measure to his having withheld from her the fact of the presence of his friend at the Ellesmeres. She had discovered that, possibly, and was bitter in consequence. But that was no subject for immediate consideration. That which was really important, was the truth of her story, what the consequences of this last act might be. But, however rash, however blamable, his only thought was how to help him now to avoid or bear the consequences.

At the door of the ballroom he prepared to leave her.

"Take care, Jerome," she said more gently, "don't

you get yourself into a scrape through over-kindness. You can do no good, and may do yourself harm."

"I must run the risk, Virginia," he answered; "I am too fond of him to leave him alone, whatever he may have done."

It was slowly, with bent head and deeply thinking, that his Excellency recrossed the conservatory. He had said "Wait," and yet he had a half-thought that he should find him for whom he sought gone, and he was scarcely certain if he did not wish such might be the case. But no, the glass door was still closed, the man's figure still stood out against it, as he once more drew near.

He paused a second before speaking, almost as if expecting a word; but as none came, "Prince Lescynski," he said, quietly, "I asked you to wait, but yet anything I can say is, I think, superfluous. There is no need for me to tell you that in all and every rank of life a lady is entitled to choose her guests, and that to appear uninvited is to place the hostess in the unenviable position of informing you that you are not welcome."

There was a reply then, the voice quick and unsteady, "Does she know that I am here?" while through his mind flashed the memory of Virginia's mocking smile.

"She recognised you," his Excellency answered gravely.

He looked up then in frank astonishment. "Recognised me!" he repeated.

"Yes, at the moment that you spoke to Miss Shore before following her here; you forget, I think, that your voice was not disguised. She was quite close to you. It was a very unfortunate moment," he added slowly, significantly.

"I come of an unfortunate race," the young man answered, lifting dark sorrowful eyes to his companion, "luck is not likely to be my partner. You may believe me or not, Excellency; but what I feel most in all this miserable business is the apparent carelessness towards you, and forgetfulness of your previous kindness."

"It would have spared me much as well as yourself," the old man replied. "Where are you staying?" he added after a moment.

"With the Ellesmeres, but I need not add that it is without their knowledge that I am here to-night. The madness was entirely my own, no one had any share in it."

"I cannot speak to you here: my previous words you understand were a message,—having delivered them in this place, it is impossible for me to add anything further. This door is unlocked, I believe, it would be better for you to go at once from here; it would be useless running the risk of fresh recognition."

In silence Dorislaus opened the door; the bright cold moonlight shone down on to the marble terrace

outside, a chill air stole into the scented heated atmosphere of the conservatory.

There seemed nothing he could say, it was indeed best to attempt to say nothing; he stooped and picked up his mask, with a faint idea of avoiding recognition, and with a bow, took a step outside.

But it was not thus they parted. Some unpreventable expression of affection led the old man out on to the terrace, and standing thus by the younger, he took his hand.

“You say yours is an unlucky race: I knew your father—and your mother,” he added; “they may have left you a heritage of misfortune, but they left you as well a heritage of remembered courage wherewith to bear it.”

As he felt the kindly pressure, heard the kind words, “Excellency,” Dorislaus’s voice trembled, “forgive me—though it is unforgivable to multiply your difficulties—it is for the last time, that I swear.”

“I will see you,” his Excellency said in answer. “Something must be done—a life of idleness is impossible. I will go to Ehrenberg to-morrow.”

“No, do not trouble about me—I shall go to Paris. I will cease to be idle, of that rest assured; though to a man who is a soldier and nothing else, a career apart from soldiering is difficult—but it shall be found.”

“And you will let me know what it is and where it takes you?” He still held the young man’s hand

in his—"I shall look for a letter." In silence then they parted.

To Dorislaus Lescynski the various exits from the Palace were well known; once beyond this marble terrace where the moon shone so clearly, there were dark shadowy paths that led finally to the small door by which Emilie and Antoine Lütz had once loitered, but to-night there was no likelihood of meeting any one, for though there were signs of the frost departing, it still held enough to make midnight walks untempting. His steps grew slower as he passed into the shadow, and finally, almost unconsciously, he paused altogether, a prey to surging thought, the future almost as much as the present full of torment.

The ungovernable temptation which had brought him hither to-night, and which had rendered every difficulty easy to be surmounted, had given place,—under the stress of disappointment,—to despair. He had been so hopeless, that the revival of his hopes, through his own folly and madness, seemed to have increased his difficulties tenfold. And yet, after all, everything was just as it had been before he set out on this ill-starred expedition; he could scarcely now recall the especial form of madness that had suggested it to him—everything was exactly the same, except that he had Virginia's mocking eyes to remember in addition.

She had not planned his discomfiture, of that he felt somehow assured; but she had recognised his

mistake, his hopes, his disappointment, and the knowledge had amused her.

His instinctive dislike of her redoubled. A shadow moving amongst the other shadows disturbed him, and he looked up to find Jerome Shore by his side.

"You are as mad as I am," he said, quickly, speaking the first thought that came into his head, "and you," a trifle bitterly, "have still something to lose."

"Why did you not trust me with your plans?" Jerome asked, ignoring his words; his kind eyes were disturbed and anxious.

"And you think if I had, I should have been here now? No, Jerome; the person I should have trusted ought to have been your sister. It would have amused her to carry such a prank through successfully." For the life of him he could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"Virginia recognised you, she told me."

"She had me at a disadvantage, you see, as I did not discover her—or rather I was unprepared for a second disguise."

"Yes, that was a secret of which only the Princess was aware."

"But she told me also that the Princess had recognised me."

"Yes, so I understood."

He made no comment on the situation, and after a moment Dorislaus went on quietly. "Good-bye, Jerome; I am not as bad as I appear—to you I

mean, and those who have tried to help me, I am only"—he paused—"reckless."

"What are you going to do?" Jerome queried, his hand on the other's arm.

"Nothing more eccentric than a night journey," the dark eyes softened into momentary amusement. "I shall return to Vienna, or Paris, perhaps."

Their friendship, true as it was, had not often expended itself in words. Dorislaus was never communicative about himself, and this great subject, about which their ideas were so different, had built up a slight additional partition; but to-night, in Dorislaus's voice, there were the tones of one who sought for human sympathy.

"You must not despair," Jerome said gently, touched to immediate consciousness of the desire for expansiveness, which the other felt; "you must step out of all this," vaguely, "and adopt a new life."

"It seems rather hard," Dorislaus answered, "to spend the first half of one's life finding out what one wants, merely to spend the second in doing without it."

"But if you have to——" Jerome's slighter nature grasped more clearly the inexorableness of Fate—to Dorislaus Lescynski it was an enemy to be met and fought with, like any other.

Small wonder that the one year's constant fight with such a foe had killed his father before hope was given back. To fight every step of the way with the decrees of life is to wear out strength in a hope-

less cause. But though we are the result of previous generations, we ourselves only have to manage the result—so difficult when we are often ignorant of the steps that led up to it.

This passionate vehement nature, with its infinite capacity for love and tenderness and friendship, was the same as that of the man whose one year's battle with untoward Fate had been his death-warrant.

Virginia would have recognised the futility of such a warfare, and seizing on what was best in the new conditions, have evolved a fresh world in which she would have lived; Jerome would have wished to do so, and theoretically and alone could have echoed Virginia's teaching, but standing by his friend the theory vanished, and he was only capable of recognising his view, of sympathising with his despair.

"You must adopt a fresh career," he said affectionately, still with his hand on the other's arm. "Take your sword elsewhere. There can be no difficulty; the petty difficulties of a Court like this could not really stand between you, a tried soldier, and work of that kind. I have a good mind," with swift impetuosity, "to toss it all up myself and go with you."

Dorislaus smiled. "Good-bye, Jerome, you must not linger here. But you are right. I said I would not take service elsewhere—that was a mistake, but it must not be the idleness of this sort of soldiering, I must go where there is work to be done."

“Tell me where that is,” said Jerome, eagerly.

“When I know myself you shall know,”—he held Jerome’s hand in a firm clasp, “and you will write.”

“Yes, but that is not enough,” Captain Shore insisted, “I must see you.”

“Yes,” the dark eyes lightened a little; “I cannot afford to be forgotten—my friends are too few to allow of that.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ Sweet-eyed was she,
And timid as some loving memory,
'Midst the world's clamour.”

THE morning after the ball rose sad and grey. The exhilaration in the air was gone, not one breath stirred the leafless branches; by-and-by it would rain, in the meantime the snow was changing its brilliant clearness for a dull muddy brown.

The dreariness abroad extended itself in part to the dwellers in the villa, at least so far as the women were concerned. The joy of the previous evening was a little overshadowed this morning for Dolores, in renewed impressions of the parting from Jem, and the words that had preceded it; and as for Emilie, the cloud of her own troubles so closely enveloped her now, that it was rarely she could escape from it. M. Desprez had not put in an appearance, to his daughter's distinct relief, as she went about her household duties, now and then glancing abroad at the heavy lowering sky, and

thinking how harmful such weather must be to any one ill, and in addition insufficiently fed and clothed. The warmth and comfort of the room were a reproach.

A servant entering with letters changed the current of her thoughts, but only for a moment; taking up the one offered to her mechanically, the sight of the handwriting caused her to start and glance nervously round. But only Dolores was present, Dolores standing by the window, an unusual expression of care on her young face. She rose and left the room hurriedly, but she did not wait till she was up-stairs before opening her letter. Antoine did not often write; never unless there was something of import to say, and now, when their meetings occurred so often, it must be something of great importance that was the cause of these many close-written pages.

They certainly when read gave food for thought.

“I am not very well, have caught a bad cold, and am therefore not going to Miss Shore to-morrow, as I am sure you would think it unwise, and as I have something very important to tell you and ask your advice upon, I write.

“A brother of my father’s has died and left me £500—not a fortune, though it seems so for the moment. At any rate it has buoyed me up with wonderful hopes of what it may accomplish, or prove the road to. What do you think of my going

to a warmer climate, establishing myself, say, in Italy, and if possible taking pupils? It seems to me that with such a start a livelihood for two would soon be secured. I am afraid, however, even with such a fortune to favour my pretensions, your father would not consider my claims to your hand very favourably?

“Writing is slow cold work. I wish I could see you.
ANTOINE.”

“Are you going out?” Dolores questioned. “It is going to rain,” she added, warningly.

“I shall not be long,” Emilie spoke absently, and did not turn her head, “I shall be back by breakfast-time.”

Once out in the raw cold morning, she hurried along, not lifting her eyes from the ground. On the spur of the moment she had decided on this step, but none the less, she did not disguise from herself how changed she had become during these last weeks for her to consider it possible.

She did not strive to consider the steps that had brought her to this stage—on the contrary, shrank from thinking of them—and only trembled at the result, the end, which, if she lifted her eyes, she knew it would be possible to foresee.

Arrived at the house she sought, she was shown into a drawing-room, where she was immediately joined by a young woman.

“Emilie, dear,” she spoke in French, was French

in every turn of her head, every fold of her dress, "what brings you, the model housewife, here at such an hour?"

But Emilie did not smile in answer.

"I am in great trouble, Marie," she said, quietly. "Antoine is ill," blushing a little, "and wishes to see me. You know I cannot ask him home. My father will not allow it. Will you arrange for me to meet him here?"

"Of course. What a little coward you are!" the other woman said, gaily. "Why, twenty fathers would never have stopped me if I had been in earnest. And such a father! I don't believe M. Desprez could withstand you, if you went persistently to work."

Was she just a coward, Emilie wearily wondered, whom the discomforts of living at variance with the household frightened—for whom happiness was not worth purchasing, at the risk of such discomfort?

In the old days she had often wondered in which direction duty lay, in these latter days she had persuaded herself that it and her own desires walked hand-in-hand. Nearly always a dangerous deception. But since these unacknowledged meetings had taken place, she had lost a little of the clear light which used to be shed on her path, though it was still less of herself than of him she thought—what might not her love and care do for him? it was hard to see him drifting into bad health and burying

great possibilities, of which she believed him to be possessed, in a bitter daily struggle for bread. The point of view had changed, and this other voice, instead of the duty she owed to her father, this other duty, so she read it, was always making itself heard. Surely we should be judged by our temptations—a judgment which would widen the margin for many.

When she left Madame Goldstein's house with the knowledge of that prospective meeting, there was not the same trouble she had experienced when she had first held silence about his presence at Miss Shore's. There was something desperate and final about this, that precluded the nervousness consequent on any smaller matters.

When she re-entered the house, Dolores was still standing by the window, apparently in the same attitude in which she had left her. Strange, it was chiefly for this girl she thought, if it should ever come to pass, that she should leave her home. A persistent voice urged her responsibility, hinted at coming unhappiness, warned her of all she owed to the untried ignorant life which she saw drifting into trouble.

"Dolores," she said, her own anxieties for the moment forgotten. "What is it, child? Is it not breakfast-time?"

"M. Desprez has gone out," she answered, absently. "He was late and very busy, he said I was to tell you."

The rehearsals for the new opera were in full swing. M. Desprez was occupied at the theatre most of the day.

“And you have not had your lesson?”

“No, I am to practise, and have a lesson later. It was a beautiful sight last night, was it not?” she added.

“Yes.” Emilie’s assent was also a little absent: she was carving a chicken as she spoke, her thoughts clearly elsewhere.

“Did not you wish,” Dolores’s quiet voice was a little excited, “that you could go to the ball?”

“No,” Emilie smiled at the unusual excitement, “I don’t think I did; at any rate, I am sure that if I had gone I should not have enjoyed it much.”

“Oh, I am sure I should. Captain Shore,” with a quick flush, “said he wished I was going.”

Another tug at Emilie’s heart-strings, as she noted the flush, heard the thrill in the voice. Ah, why is life so complicated! In its simplest form it is impossible to do anything without its involving some responsibility towards our neighbour. And no use dallying with the question, “Who is my neighbour?” The answer has been given for all eternity. If she elected to follow her own will,—she found herself surveying the future, even whilst the blush was still fading,—what would become of this poor child, meeting life, so ignorant of its dangers. And constantly during those two days the same note of warning was

struck. Though it was impossible to put the fear into words; when she strove to do so, it all resolved itself into Miss Shore's kindness to a young country-woman, into a few words from her brother. To Dolores herself the one seemed as valuable as the other, still, none the less, Emilie's heart warned her of danger, which her head could not distinguish. There was no secret about Dolores's enthusiasm to further perplex her—the photograph of the Huguenot was shown to her in simple pride; his words, or the tenor of them, were easily drawn from her. There was nothing to fear—and yet she feared. Feared so much, that all the way to Madame Goldstein's house the following afternoon it was less of her own future she was thinking than of that of Dolores, though when she was shown into the small sitting-room where Antoine awaited her, all her own anxieties crowded afresh upon her.

"This is good of you," he exclaimed, rising and taking her hands in his.

"You are better?" she questioned in return.

There were unaccustomed nervous tones in her voice, usually so quiet and steady, there was no hiding her perturbation.

"Sit down," he said, gently. "Yes, I am much better, this news has done me good already. I was desperately anxious last time I saw you, and I spoke foolishly. But when I am calm, I see the necessity for your father's decision. Now, however, I have fresh hope; this money gives me a better chance of

making a home, it gives me courage to go, because I see now a prospect of return."

She smoothed his hair gently with her hand—she was growing calmer, cheered too by his hopefulness.

"It was despair, Emilie, made me selfish, you see; it was temporary, and I am no longer afraid."

"Neither am I afraid to-day, Antoine,—the selfish proposition is to come from me. I came to tell you that I am ready to go with you—if you do not think a wife will add to your difficulties."

"That is not what I fear, but," he hesitated, "your father—he will disapprove, of that we have no reason to doubt." He paused.

"I am going to speak to him myself, Antoine," she said, firmly, "to-day," though she grew paler at the words. "Perhaps I have been cowardly in my fear of displeasing him, but at any rate I mean to speak to-day. If he consents, it will make me happier, and if he refuses"—the man did not meet her eyes, but his thin hands clasped showed momentary nervousness—"if he refuses," she continued, quietly, "I shall be prepared to marry you all the same."

"Would you rather *I* saw him?" the man suggested, as she rose to go; "you know that it is just as you wish."

"No, Antoine, it is I who must speak; perhaps it is true that I ought to have spoken before—but he knows," she added, sadly.

It was dusk when she stood once more in the street; a steady, soaking, windless rain was falling,

but she did not call a cab, did not even hurry her footsteps, as she trod the wet deserted streets, and finally entered the muddy country road that led to her home.

With such thoughts as were now her companions, externals were very insignificant trials.

So unwilling was she to come into personal collision with her father, that her first idea had been to leave her home at once, and allow time to smooth—if such smoothing were possible—the evil feelings such departure would engender. It was the strong sudden consciousness of responsibility with regard to Dolores that had caused her to hesitate; it was chiefly the thought of her that had persuaded her to the interview which she was prepared to seek, knowing, or at least fearing, it would be useless.

Despite cloak and umbrella, she was wet and chilled when she entered the house; but notwithstanding, she did not go up-stairs, but giving these to the servant, went straight to the study. It was an occasion on which no good could be expected from delay. And yet, when she opened the door, and, standing on the threshold with wet muddy boots and damp raiment, saw M. Desprez in the comfortable room, seated in a big chair, drawn up to the bright open fire, his velvet smoking-coat, his cigarette, the very smile on his face, all speaking of well-earned repose, she felt sadly at a disadvantage.

“Been out?” he queried, looking up at the opening door, “how very foolish, and such an evening!

Well, come to the fire, though perhaps it would be wiser for you to change your boots first."

"No." She shook her head, closing the door as she spoke; her voice was nervous and strained to her own ears as she went on, "I want to speak to you."

"Sit down then." She did not obey, but remained standing. She had moved to the fireside, and was close beside him, so close that he could note the trembling of her lips, the effort it caused her to speak. Perhaps he was not altogether unprepared for her words.

"Father, I want you to reconsider what you said about Antoine Lütz."

"You are not going to revive that old story, Emilie, surely. It worried me a great deal at the time—it is dead and buried, let it rest."

"I cannot. I am not a child, father. I chose deliberately a long time ago, and I cannot change."

"My dear Emilie, it is such a pity to talk about things which only make us both uncomfortable. Your happiness is my only object, as you know: it seems hard on me that you should try to fight against my knowledge of what is best."

It was a good sentence, M. Desprez felt, and in a way a final one, but Emilie did not so accept it.

"Best," she repeated, "what is best? At one time," with most unusual bitterness, "you thought this was best."

"Yes," he assented, cheerfully, "but I had to

recognise I was mistaken. I allow that I was much disappointed in him, for I had hoped great things."

"But *I* am not disappointed," she insisted.

He looked at her a moment, and then laughed. "My dear Emilie, the proof is wanting. To prophesy is all very well, but to convince the world you must fulfil your prophecy, and until then——"

He shrugged his shoulders and took up his cigar again, which he had laid aside.

Diversity of aim is surely the greatest divider this dividing world knows.

"Well, don't let us talk about it any more," he said, kindly. "It is a subject, I fear, on which we must agree to differ. When he has a statue in the market-place, I will admit that you were right."

"But, father, I am in earnest, it is no light matter to me. You *must* listen."

He gave a heavy sigh, but sat silent, whilst she told him the story of the £500, of the hopes that it had bred in his heart.

Even when she had finished he made no reply for a moment—and she waited, half fearing some angry words; but no, when he spoke there was no difference in his tone.

"And my foolish unworldly daughter thinks that this £500 is quite a fortune, on which housekeeping may be begun. It is very lucky she has some one to guide her, and keep her from all the foolish things her kind heart might tempt her to. Pity—is so misleading."

“Not pity”—she spoke quite firmly, though she did not lift her eyes—“but love. Love that has lasted five years now, and which owed its beginning to your encouragement. Father,” she had her hand on his arm as she became aware that he was rising with the intention of leaving her, “do not drive me to do anything desperate. Recognise that I am in earnest, and help me.”

“My dear Emilie,” he was standing up and had again laid aside his cigar, “all girls think they are in earnest. I am sure you think you are. Don’t let us mention this subject again; it makes me very unhappy,” and he kissed her affectionately, taking her cold hands in his. “Life is too monotonous at present, we must have a change. Directly the first representation of the opera is over—I cannot get away before—I shall take you away. I leave it to you to talk it over with Dolores, and decide where it shall be.”

The tears were rising to her eyes, but she kept them back till she heard the door close behind him, and then they fell in a steady flow.

In the hopelessness of the moment it seemed as if it would have been better always to have gone her own way, leading an entirely selfish life—that her father’s way was best; it is so difficult if one leaves one’s own orbit to avoid collisions, and what good do they do? She had annoyed her father, and had not benefited herself.

Wearily she made her way up to her own room,

and there penned a letter to Antoine, a despairing little note, which told of utter failure in her purpose.

“My father will listen to nothing I have to say. I have failed entirely, but I should have blamed myself if I had not tried.”

Another little note reached Antoine by the same post.

“DEAR M. LÜTZ,—I hear from my daughter of the piece of good luck that has befallen you : £500 is not a fortune, still it may prove the foundation of one. At one time, as you know, I thought that your future success rested in your own hands. You did not then choose to accomplish all that was expected from you ; but as one who had hopes, and believes still that with hard work even a false start may be remedied, I send you this note and the enclosed, which you can look upon as a loan if you like, in the new home to which I understand you are going.” Enclosed was a note for £100.

It took Antoine Lütz a long time to consider how to frame his reply ; under the circumstances it seemed hard to refuse what looked so like a helping hand, but interpreted plainly he knew the kindness meant an implied condition, which he was unwilling, unable to accept.

With a line of thanks he returned the money.

After that evening Emilie made no further attempt at confidence, rather avoided *tête-à-têtes* with her

father, perhaps, if the truth had been known, so did he; but he had not much spare time or interest for anything beyond his rehearsals at the opera-house, which were absorbing him entirely, as the night of the first representation was approaching.

Once at dinner he had suddenly proposed that Emilie and Dolores should occupy his box on the eventful evening. He looked from the one girl to the other with his happy genial smile as he made the proposition, but Emilie immediately replied that it would be impossible. She blushed a vivid red, and her eyes fell at the refusal, but M. Desprez did not press the suggestion.

"My daughter never goes the first night," he explained to the guest—it had become rather a habit for him to bring a man home to dinner with him. "She is shy, I suppose, or nervous. She is always afraid something will go wrong."

She did not assent or contradict him, did not even heed Dolores's eager eyes, of which she was well aware, but let the talk drift into other channels.

Later, when father and daughter were alone, "It was very indiscreet of me," M. Desprez said, "to make the proposal I did at dinner. Of course you were right. We must keep Dolores out of sight as long as possible."

"That was not my reason," Emilie answered, steadily, though her colour came and went.

There was a challenge in the words, but M. Desprez ignored it. He dreaded any misunder-

standing which might bring up a subject from which no good could ensue, which troubled his peace, and made him worried and uncomfortable. To himself, he would have said that his sympathies were so active that unless he could do good there was no use evoking painful recollections, and to one of his temperament the unspoken of very soon passed into the region of the unreal.

M. Desprez's rehearsals were not the only ones at present in preparation. For some time now a play had been in preparation up at the Castle. It was an ambitious attempt conceived by Miss Shore, and weeks of preparation had been necessary. It had been decided that it should take place just before Lent, which was the end of the season. The play had been chosen with a view to a fencing scene it contained, the novelty of the situation having decided Virginia in its favour.

The scheme had pleased the Princess. With all a spoilt woman's craving after novelty, she was always delighted when any one suggested a new amusement, and it was from Virginia these suggestions generally came.

The Princess clung to her companionship: it was always entertaining, her remarks afforded amusement that could not be obtained elsewhere, but though she accepted the entertainment, it was with a nervous unacknowledged dread. Since the evening of the ball, other feelings had been added — or perhaps only strengthened. Mean-

while, apparently unheeding of the wherefore that brought the world to her feet, Virginia went on her way, perhaps in her heart of hearts found greater entertainment in the consciousness of inspiring fear, than love would ever have given her. Love cannot look on and be amused, so would have lost for her the vividness of drama, which constituted the chief pleasure life afforded.

"It is a pity," she would think, and shrug her shoulders at the memory of some delicate veiled allusion which had brought a momentary shade of colour to the pale cheek of the Princess, an allusion so vague that it needed intuition to guess its meaning, intuition which the momentary colour betrayed; but the knowledge of the drama that had been played under the roof—which perhaps still held a sequence—added zest to her life.

"It is a pity," as she thought; theoretically she would have wished to keep silence, but now and then it was impossible.

Her latest amusement was teaching Dolores to act; her efforts were not very successful, but that was not the teacher's fault, his Excellency encouragingly told her, when she mentioned to him the want of success.

She would set her pieces to learn, and on these wet winter afternoons would often send for her, and let her repeat them with appropriate gesture and action. But, though graceful and anxious to please, all dramatic instinct seemed wanting, and

even when Virginia would take her place and show her how it ought to be done, there was no mimetic or imitative power to enable her to grasp tone and movement. She could feel—Virginia had sometimes seen the eyes fill with tears when she herself was the actress, but there was no power to express what she felt.

After one or two postponements, the first night of the Opera had been decided on for the 4th of March, a Thursday. The previous day an invitation, one of those which had of late been common, had been received from Miss Shore, asking Dolores to come to her at eight that evening.

“Of course this invitation includes Miss Desprez. I only address it to you, Dolly, because it is to tell you to be prepared to recite the poem with which we amused ourselves last time.”

When Dolores hurried into Emilie with the note in her hand, and she had read it, “To-night!” she exclaimed; “oh, I cannot go, it is impossible!” Then, noting the cloud of disappointment, “But that is no reason against your going, dear,” she added, gently, “at least I do not think so. But do not worry, I will see what can be done. You wish to go?”

“Yes,” Dolores stooped and kissed her, “yes—very much.”

Emilie sighed. “I will take you,” she added, after a pause, “even if I cannot stay with you.”

She did not enter into explanations, gave no reason for her decision, and to Dolores’s unsophisti-

cated, incurious nature, none was necessary. Grown-up people, with their work and leisure, lived in a world apart from that which children inhabited—with these she classed herself—in her simple upbringing, the children did not question or note the actions of their elders.

And of late the house had not been the same. M. Desprez was never at home—as much as was possible for one of his temperament, he was anxious, not really, not deep down in his heart, but superficially, enough to make daily life a trifle less smooth than usual. He had no time to notice Emilie's absences, her thin white cheeks, and the nervous colour that went and came so quickly; these were as little remarked as the happy light that was always shining in Dolores's eyes—the change that was slowly taking place in her, converting the silent dreamy child into a soft-eyed smiling girl. For the moment his own interests were all-absorbing, all-engrossing.

To-day was no exception to that which had of late been the rule.

A line from M. Desprez to say he was too busy to return to dinner, that he would run into the club during a leisure half-hour, but to be away from the theatre longer was an impossibility.

The two girls sat down therefore alone, and consequently perhaps, or perhaps because with both of them their thoughts were elsewhere, little was said, and the meal was soon over.

But Emilie was not so preoccupied but that she was aware of the unusual suppressed excitement under which Dolores was labouring, was well aware of the want of appetite, the eyes that kept wandering to the clock.

Often as Miss Shore had asked the girl, this was the first time the invitation had been for the evening, and in their quiet regular life such a little thing was an excitement. "Especially at Dolores's age," she said to herself, as if to argue out a case, "it would excite any girl."

"What shall I wear, Emilie?" the girl asked a little nervously, as she rose. "My white muslin?"

"Yes, certainly," Emilie answered, kindly. "What a fortunate thing it was we had it made, and that an opportunity has so soon come to put it on!"

A little later Dolores reappeared, wrapped up in her fur coat.

"Are you not ready?" she questioned, evident disappointment in her tones.

Emilie, who was sitting in a chair very deep in thought, started at the voice.

"Yes, dear, directly, I have only a cloak to put on. I cannot stay with you," the red flushing her cheeks for a moment, "as I told you, I have an appointment this evening. But Miss Shore will forgive me, I know. I will call for you whenever she wishes."

The explanation fell on inattentive ears.

"It is time we started," Dolores said, as if in answer.

"We are going to drive, I have sent for a cab, so there is no hurry," but Emilie did not resent the childish eagerness. It was again with a shadow of pity she glanced at the slight figure now standing against the window, peering into the darkness.

"It is here!" she exclaimed, "I see the lights," and at the same moment the maid opened the door to announce its arrival.

"Will you wait here for a moment?" Miss Desprez said, as the cab stopped at the now well-known door. "I will run up and explain the matter to Miss Shore, and will see that it is all right, and at what time you are to be fetched."

The man had opened the door whilst she was speaking, and a moment later she had disappeared, leaving Dolores alone, leaning forth into the darkness, in a vain attempt to cool her flushed cheeks. Perhaps there was a thought in Emilie's mind that it would be easier to tell her story to Miss Shore alone than with Dolores's soft eyes watching her.

That her carefully guarded, never-spoken-of secret had already passed from her keeping into Virginia's had never crossed her mind.

But she felt her apology falter when she stood face to face with her hostess. Her own consciousness may have aided her nervousness, but it seemed to her as she made her excuses, and intrusted Dolores to Miss Shore's care, that she was read through and through by the cold smiling eyes that looked down on her. There were moments when

Virginia Shore appeared very tall, her slenderness aiding the illusion, and to-night her long clinging soft silk gown of dead white added also to her height.

She had risen at Miss Desprez's entrance, and as the latter refused to sit down, Miss Shore remained standing also.

"A climax of some kind has been reached," Virginia was thinking, as her eyes noted the shifting colour, her ears the uncertainties of speech,—“if you drive people hard enough, the chances are they end by doing something unexpected. Papa Desprez may awake one day to find even Emilie has surprised him! How is M. Lütz?” she said, half turning away as she spoke. “I am sorry to see him looking so ill.”

It was not difficult to find a clue.

“Do you think him looking ill?” Emilie asked, anxiety in every tone and look.

“I have not seen him lately,” Miss Shore replied, “but he wrote he was too ill to come here, so our duets have had a pause.”

“He looks to me more delicate than really ill,” Emilie said, as if pleadingly.

“She sees him elsewhere,” was Miss Shore's immediate inward comment. “Hence the reason of his no longer coming here. And under his influence she is finding out that she has a will of her own apart from papa's, and he is urging her to make use of it. Unfortunately I have no time to-night to pursue the subject further.”

"I am sorry you cannot stay, but I will take care of Dolores, and try to make an actress of her, though I fear it will not be easy; but at ten o'clock I have to go to the Princess's, so I must ask you to send for her then."

"That will be quite easy; I will call for her on my way back."

"I wonder where she is going?" Miss Shore's thoughts so ran, as she took her visitor's hand.

"You are feverish," she said, as she did so, "your hand is burning. I shall have to tell M. Desprez you want looking after."

"No, no," Emilie answered, almost imploringly, "I am quite well."

"I promise not to worry him till after the great night, but then some one ought to point out to him that you are not looking well,—you want change."

Again the quick-coming colour. But she did not reply, only repeated her good night and left.

For a minute after she had left Virginia stood in front of the picture on the easel, looking into the eyes so like her own, with the same shadowy untranslatable smile, which always seemed to tell of a world in which he looked at things hidden from others, but of delicate amusement to himself.

"And change," she repeated, slowly, "I should not really be surprised. No," shaking her head, "she has too little courage."

But while thinking, the memory of a forgotten note made her hurry away to her own room.

“It won’t take a minute,” she thought, “and it ought to go by this post.”

Meanwhile Dolores was hurrying up the wide shallow stair alone—because on Emilie’s return with her message of welcome, she had told the servant it was unnecessary to mount the stairs again—her book in one hand, the folds of her muslin gown in the other, her mind full of but one thing, the two hours that were before her. Without a pause her light feet carried her up to the door, and with a little knock, not waiting to hear if it were answered, she opened it, and had already taken a step within, when a glance sufficed to show her that there was but one occupant of the room, and that one that no acquaintance with rendered less awe-inspiring. Miss Shore’s great mastiff might follow her and be her friend and slave, but to Dolores he was merely an alarming uncomprehended animal of unusual size, whose overtures, whether friendly or adverse, were to be fled from in terror; and when, as now, he lifted himself up and advanced towards her, growling suspiciously, there was nothing to be done but to retreat as swiftly as might be.

With the door closed, and she on the safe side, there were a few moments’ peace, succeeded by desire to gain admittance. She knocked again, first a timid hesitating knock, and then a louder attempt; but to neither was there any response. She opened the door a little, only to find a great head raised within a foot of her, and then a low growl, this time

an angry one, which might have been interpreted, "Either stay out or come in, and let me see who you are."

But the option did not reach Dolores: the beats of her heart quickened, she closed the door silently; some fleeting thoughts she had of seeking the servant and asking his help, but her courage failed at the thought. And all the time she pictured Miss Shore, perhaps just behind the curtain in the narrow recess, reading, writing, anyhow calmly awaiting her. Perhaps deciding at length that she was not coming.

In desperation she opened the door a few inches and called her by name; but there was no reply, unless you could call such an uneasy snuffing, mingled with irritated growls, so close that the door was only held open long enough for the one little inefficient cry, and then swiftly closed.

Of her own courage, or want of it, she was not thinking; there was room, indeed, but for one thought in her mind, and that was one that the great clock ticking away overhead was reminding her of with every tick, that it was a quarter past eight, so that already a whole quarter of an hour of this hoped-for evening was over. With this thought she took a few steps down-stairs, but the servant had disappeared. To fetch him now she would have to open the door and go outside and ring. No, there was no use thinking of it, the bare idea made her redden with shyness.

Once again she opened the door, the slightest chink only, and called, but with the same results; the grim sentinel was still on the alert, and evidently, if one might judge by the sounds that reached her, growing more irritable as time passed. To push past him now and enter the room from which his presence barred her, was not to be even imagined.

But this last disappointment was too much: almost unknown to herself, her eyes slowly filled with tears, two had fallen on to her cloak, even before she was aware of the fact, and then she only loosed the folds of her muslin gown, hitherto so carefully lifted out of the reach of any possible dust, and wiped them away with her ungloved hand.

But the suspicious action had a spectator. Jerome Shore, hurrying down the opposite corridor, saw the raised hand—the action so easy of interpretation, and was not long left in wonder as to the wherefore.

At the sound of the approaching footsteps and at the sight of him, oblivious of the tears still on her cheeks, of her wet eyelashes, of everything but that he would help her, she hurried towards him, calling him by name.

“What is it?” he questioned, taking her hand in his, for the moment really marvelling what disaster had befallen her.

But in a moment a few faltering words had told him enough to enable him to realise the position of affairs.

To Dolores the mere telling of her trouble seemed

to place it in a new and semi-ridiculous light. With her hand in Captain Shore's—he had not let go of it—her courage had sufficiently revived to make her former hesitation appear like cowardice, and yet, when he laid his hand on the lock and a low growl on the other side gave warning that her enemy was still on the alert, he felt her clasp tighten, and "Take care," she said quickly, "he is just inside the room."

He did not laugh, did not even smile—of that Dolores was assured, because directly she had spoken her eyes sought his with a nervous dread of mockery—but he pushed open the door and entered the room; first dismissing the dog with a few peremptory words from the position he had taken up, and then turning, drew her into the room.

"I was really frightened," she said, apologetically. "He growled so," she added, "and I thought he might not know me."

Her soft eyes, the lashes still wet, were lifted pleadingly as she spoke.

"He is a horrid creature," Jerome emphatically replied, ready sympathy in his looks. "Women should have lapdogs," vaguely, "and pugs, if they want pets, though really, you know," with a little laugh, "they are horrid."

"But they are smaller."

"Yes, Prince looks as if he would eat you in one mouthful; but he wouldn't, you must comfort yourself with that thought. Here is Virginia," as a step

was heard, "we will tell her what we think of her style of pet."

He dropped the small hand he still held almost unconsciously, at the sound of an opening door.

"Don't tell her." The words reached him clearly, the slight touch on his sleeve emphasised them, her lifted hand was brushing the tell-tale drops away. "Please," imploringly.

He had no time for more than to nod assent and comprehension.

Miss Shore, only conscious of her own shortcomings, came forward with a few apologetic words on the subject of her absence, and in saying them was quite unaware of anything wrong. Dolores was always shy and silent, Captain Shore had a message to give from Count Fernhof.

"He will look in presently, Virginia; he has something to say to you, and as he chose to believe I was not attending, he said he would come in and tell you himself. As I am always attending to whoever is speaking to me, I thought it was a needless insult, and so told him it was probably only an excuse to do what he wished."

Jerome looked at his sister with a challenging smile as he spoke, but when she answered easily, "Your guess is probably correct, Jerome; men, as a rule, don't give themselves unnecessary trouble unless it pleases them," there was nothing further to say. "And you," she added, "as you have not a message, why have you come?"

"Isn't she an agitating hostess, Miss Traherne? Fancy when you call on people having to give a reason. Not that it really matters," turning back to his sister, "because I have several reasons. I wanted to see you, of course, and to watch how you give a lesson in—whatever it is—and to give a lesson myself; because it is not only to you that Miss Traherne is going to owe her future success in life."

"Well, we will excuse any further explanations or reasons now, Jerome. It is late already," glancing at the clock. "Take off your cloak, Dolores. I hope you have not forgotten your book."

Dolores obeyed at once.

"That is a very pretty dress," Miss Shore said, as her quick eyes took in the becomingness of the white muslin.

"Is it not?" Dolores answered quickly, pride in the words. "I have never had an evening dress before."

Captain Shore had taken up a paper, but over the top he glanced to say, "It is a lovely frock, but I am sure it ought to have a blue sash."

"A blue sash?" Dolores repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes; in all the books I have ever read girls always wear white muslin frocks with blue sashes, and they always do on the stage."

"You are quite right, Jerome. Wait a moment."

Virginia disappeared as she spoke, and a few moments later returned, an Indian silk sash in her

hand, heavily embroidered in blue and gold. With quick hands she arranged it round the girl's slender waist, tying it in graceful loops.

"There, Dolores," leading her up to a draped mirror in one corner of the room, "now we have pleased everybody. It looks charming, and it must help you to forget all the many times you have struggled through your lessons with me." She turned the girl's crimsoning cheek towards her, and kissed her lightly.

"You are too good," Dolores exclaimed, enthusiastically. "Never in all my life has any one been so good to me."

They were a few unweighed words, born of her own loving admiration. They reproached her afterwards, when she stood in the solitude of her little room, facing the photographs of those to whom she owed everything.

"Now, Dolores, your lesson." The hopelessness of her task had entered into Virginia's soul; of Dolores's anxiety to please there was no doubt, but as an actress there was small hope she would ever realise success.

Miss Shore was not one to disguise the truth, or be misled by her feelings.

"You must send her to some first-rate actress," she told M. Desprez, "and have her carefully instructed in her parts. She will be quite good-looking enough on the stage, and she will always be graceful — but *voilà tout*. She has no dramatic

instincts whatever. But in the meantime it amuses me to introduce her to the science of the art, and play at teaching her."

"You are too good."

"No, frankly I am not. It amuses me to talk to any one so ignorant,—and," with a laugh, "it is always pleasant to be admired—it makes one credit the admirer with excellent taste."

Whilst Dolores recited, and Miss Shore commented, or rose up and showed how it ought to be said or done, Captain Shore, in a chair in the background, subsided into silence and a pretence of a paper.

"As you have come, you must remain quiet until we have finished," Virginia said, "not even a comment, mind."

"I always obey you, and will continue to do so, though I am one of those people to whom compulsory silence is likely to prove fatal."

Dolores laughed, a little sudden laugh which responded to the amusement in his eyes, but directly afterwards strove to regain supernatural gravity to make up for the lapse.

The piece she had learnt was a scene out of one of Corneille's plays, and Virginia, taking the man's part, tried to inspire Dolores with some of her own enthusiasm, but not successfully; and when she had gone through it once, she proposed to Jerome to come and take the part from her.

"You shall look on, Dolores," she said, kindly.

"I think you will learn more by watching than by acting. And it is very good practice learning by heart," she added.

"Thank you, Miss Traherne," Captain Shore said, "for finishing, whatever may be the reason. I am quite tired of sitting still. And besides, Virginia, I don't know that it is at all a proper play."

"Proper!" Virginia repeated, lifting her eyebrows.

"Oh, there is no trusting these old masters, they talk a great deal about love and lovers. I caught the words several times."

"What rubbish you talk, Jerome! It is the only thing suitable for acting—amateur acting, I mean. Every one has some idea, at least, how to act a love scene."

"No, Miss Traherne has not."

Virginia laughed, but there was a warning glance in the eyes she turned on her brother, and when he saw it, he turned to where the girl sat on a high-backed chair, her chin on her hands, watching the preparations, scarcely heeding their words.

"But she is going to learn," he said, and then saw with some relief in the smile that replied, that his previous words had passed unheard.

Whilst the scene was being enacted, there was a knock, and Count Fernhof entered the room. The actors did not pause; Virginia gave him a little nod of recognition, and he went over and sat by Dolores. She scarcely noticed his advent, so engrossed was she in the interpretation of the play, her face flushed

with pleasure, her dark eyes never moving from the actors, but at the end of the scene she turned to her neighbour, "Is she not wonderful?" she sighed.

It was a bond of union that André Fernhof felt and acknowledged. Till then he had scarcely noticed who was his companion, now it all came back to his memory that day at the Ellesmeres', when she had also been of the party. He had not thought that day she was nearly so pretty.

When the scene was over, they sat down and chatted idly, Captain Shore and Dolores a little apart from the others, who seemed to have something to say, and even then, in the midst of this delightful never-to-be-forgotten evening, Dolores found herself glancing at the clock, and regretting that quarter of an hour that her cowardice had lost her. Now she did not hesitate to call it cowardice.

"How can one *not* be frightened, Captain Shore?" she questioned.

The vagueness of the question puzzled him until he noticed the direction of her eyes: they were fixed on the great dog couched on a rug by the fire.

"It is sometimes wise not to be too brave; that would be foolhardy."

"What do you mean?"

"In this case I mean that to avoid an unknown dog twice your size is not cowardice."

"But you see he isn't unknown. I did not really believe he would hurt me, but still I was frightened. It seems so silly."

He was silent a second, and then, "I have been thinking, Miss Traherne, how it can be cured, and there is only one remedy—you must have a dog. No," with a laugh, "we won't begin with one that size. You shall have a medium one, and then," nodding his head sagely, "we shall see; and it must not be too small either," he added, "because you know we are agreed they are undesirable acquaintances."

Though Dolores could not recall her acquiescence in the statement, it seemed a likely one.

"I shall have a favourable opportunity to prosecute my search," he went on, "because I am going away, you know."

"No, I did not know. Oh, I am sorry!"

There was no mistaking the regretful ring in her voice. He turned his head a little, looking into the soft eyes which so clearly reflected the regret in the voice.

They were virtually alone; it would have been easy to echo the words, the tone—in such a life these mean so little, and become indeed a matter of habit—but something held him back, perhaps it was the frankly expressed sorrow.

"Not for ever," he went on; "only the hour has come to rejoin my regiment, which is in Altenberg. I have been on duty here, but it is a good moment to go, because it is just the place where the dog will be found."

She smiled, but her eyes were still a little troubled.

"Virginia, I hope you are going to offer me some

refreshment before I go," with a significant glance at the clock. "Every moment I have been expecting to see a tray appear with cakes and wine—sweet, or cherry-brandy, or something to comfort me before I venture forth."

"Shall I ring and hurry it up?"

"Yes, do. Is it not fortunate, Miss Traherne, that her guest is one who is able to look after himself; she would have no compunction in sending me home hungry and thirsty."

The momentary shadow had passed, Dolores was quite ready to laugh at his jesting words.

When the tray came, he took Dolores over to the table where it was placed, and, sitting down beside her, helped her to the dainty sandwiches and jelly, and poured out for her a glass of some delicious wine. To Dolores it was a fitting termination of the party. The beautiful glass and china, the unaccustomed delicacies, and in addition she was hungry, though she had not realised it, excitement had deprived her of appetite at dinner-time.

"This is the second time, Miss Traherne," he said, "that I have stepped in and saved you from starvation, but these are better sandwiches than those at Neuheim station."

Almost for a moment Dolores doubted if it had been for himself he had thought, when he had spoken to his sister; but it was a doubt that swiftly passed—he was fully taking his share in the little supper.

“And what shall we offer you, Virginia?”

But Virginia would take nothing. She was engaged to the Princess at ten, with a glance at the clock, and that meant supper. She returned immediately to her talk with Count Fernhof, who was one of the actors in the play she was arranging, and it was on the pretence of some arrangement he had come. He was in that stage of adoration when to be near her sufficed, and young enough to rejoice over any mutual topic that ensured her listening to what he had to say. In general, there were so many glad to be amused by her that he, young and shy, felt himself to be at a disadvantage.

As to any definite future, that exceeded his power of imagination—marriage was as far beyond his thoughts as if she was an inhabitant of another world. His love was rather passionate admiration than anything warmer and tenderer. To listen to her words, to watch every turn of the graceful head, was satisfaction enough, lifted up to a higher level, when, as on this night, she was kind and gracious, and admitted his suggestions, and was sparing in her sharp retorts. She was looking singularly well, too, all in white, and her beauty seemed softened by it. The straight folds of the Indian silk, with its wide hanging sleeves, fell all around her, giving her the whiteness and slenderness of a lily. A string of pearls was twisted into her hair; altogether she made a picture very pleasing to the eye.

A few minutes later Count Fernhof took his

departure, with some words about the engagement of which she had spoken; and when he had gone, and Virginia rising, moved over and joined them at the supper-table, Dolores became aware that Emilie was late, five minutes late.

When her faltering words explained that she had recognised the state of affairs, "Never mind," Virginia said, kindly, "don't trouble your little head: very likely Miss Desprez has been detained; my maid shall walk home with you. It is a fine night, and if you go through the gardens, you have only to cross the road and you will be at home."

And it was so arranged immediately. Thérèse was summoned, a kindly-looking, yellow-haired German.

"She will find you a scarf to put over your head, Dolores; you must not catch cold, or you will never be allowed to come again. Good night, dear; it seems very inhospitable to hurry you away, but I have no choice. I must be punctual."

Her brother walked with her to the door, and for a minute they stood in the passage without.

"See she is well wrapped up—Miss Desprez may yet appear—if," with a laugh, "she has not eloped with M. Lütz."

"Oh, I will look after her," Captain Shore answered. "I will walk down to the side-door with her."

"Thank you." She spoke more absently than usual: it was visible, as a rule, how closely her mind

attended her words, but she checked the inattention immediately, brought her thoughts back from wherever they might have wandered. "Thank you also for thinking of supper, I should not have remembered it, if it had not been for you."

"Then, Virginia, you would shortly have seen the poor child die of hunger. You really should be more observant, or rather bring your great power of observation to bear on more important subjects."

"Good night, Jerome; I must go, or I shall have to run, and it is so undignified to run in evening dress. You don't go till Tuesday, do you?"

"Tuesday night," he corrected, "there is not much longer, so you must make a great deal of me in the meantime."

"I suppose I must do without you as well as I can for six weeks."

For at Easter, a couple of months later, the play was to take place.

"What are you going to do to-night?" he questioned, still lingering, though she was no longer standing but walking down the long narrow passage that led to the main part of the house.

"David has been sent for to play before Saul," she answered with an abrupt little laugh.

"What do you mean?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Oh, we are going to discuss to-morrow's opera, and settle a supper-party afterwards—you will be asked. That over and done with, we shall have some time to devote to the arrangements for the play. It

is the life of a station-master, isn't it? Directly we lose sight of one express, we are clearing the lines and preparing for the next."

But she had hurried on and disappeared with a wave of her hand before he could reply.

Thérèse was ready when he re-entered the room; so was Dolores, wrapped up in a fur cloak, with a velvet hood of Miss Shore's, becomingly bordered with dark fur, drawn over her small head.

"Good night, Captain Shore," she said directly, in distressed tones. "I am so sorry for all the trouble I have given. But I don't believe it is really Emilie's fault, I am sure she could not help it."

"I am sure she could not," he repeated, kindly. "But now we are all ready, we will start and find out what is the matter."

"Are you coming?" she asked, when he did not take her hand, but followed her down-stairs and out into the moonlit night.

"Of course. Why, supposing you wished to speak to Thérèse, what would you do then? I am going as interpreter."

"Ah, but I speak German much better now than I did *then*," with a little conscious blush.

It pleased him to watch the pretty way the colour flushed up into her cheeks, burnt hotly for a moment, and then died away again.

"Well, let me judge. Now, say in German, 'It is a lovely night, and it is very much better to walk home and look at these stars, and trees, and'"—

waving his hand vaguely—"and ponds, than to be shut up in a cab with the windows closed.'"

Dolores laughed merrily.

"Oh, I could not! It is too long; you must make it shorter."

"Well, here is another. 'It is pleasanter to talk to you than to Thérèse.'"

"Yes, I could translate that," she said, confidently, "but then it might hurt Thérèse's feelings."

"I never thought of that. Then I suppose we must postpone that till another opportunity."

The stillness of all around, the subdued light of the stars, served to banish Dolores's shyness, she had never felt more entirely at her ease. She even found herself under the bare branches of the trees which led to the path, down which she had once walked with Emilie and Antoine,—asking her companion about his departure and of when he would return.

"I am going on Tuesday," he told her, as he had told his sister, "and I shall be away until Easter, when, as you know, my sister's play takes place."

"And you act in it?"

"Yes."

"It will be a wonderful sight," Dolores said. "She is so lovely and graceful and clever," with a sigh of admiration, "I never imagined any one like her."

He was touched by the enthusiasm of her words, which was reflected in the expression of her eyes.

"Are you going to see the new opera?" he questioned.

"I don't think that is very likely," she said, but with all its improbability her very heart seemed to stop beating at the idea.

"Why not? I am sure," looking at her critically, "you are old enough to go to a theatre, and as it is M. Desprez's theatre, I have no doubt he can arrange for you and his daughter to go. What is the good of all his influence if he cannot do a thing like that."

But Dolores only shook her head.

"Now I will tell you what I suspect, Miss Traherne; I believe they cruelly oppress you, and won't allow you to have any amusement. I never suspected M. Desprez of being a tyrant before, he does not look it, but now I am sure of it."

The idea of tyranny as associated with M. Desprez brought a smile to Dolores's lips. The subject was not reverted to again, but whilst Thérèse was on in front fitting the key into the lock, without any preface Dolores spoke of it again.

"You might," she began vaguely, "say something to him about it."

For a moment he had no clue to her words, but almost directly, something in the wistful eyes looking up at him in the starlight, told him what she meant.

"To M. Desprez? Yes, I certainly will, though I think he will not want any reminding from me. I believe he will have arranged it."

“ But you won’t forget ? ”

He had taken her hand in his—he was conscious, with the words, of a slight pressure, which betrayed the eagerness of her hopes.

“ No, I won’t forget. I have two things to remember now, *that* and the dog.”

He still held her hand, and when he said Good-bye, he laid his other over it for a moment, with a light touch that was almost a caress. “ Not really Good-bye though, because I shall have to tell you the result of my petition to M. Desprez, before I leave, so it is only *Auf wiedersehen*.”

The narrow door opened and closed behind Thérèse and her charge, and Jerome Shore was left to saunter back alone under the leafless boughs, past the Lake with the story of its bygone tragedy, still told in the gleaming waters, which to-night reflected brokenly the light of the stars. Twice he walked back and forth the length of the path, from the boundary-wall to the white marble steps of the Palace. Thinking, so it seemed, thinking deeply.

It may have been the result of his thoughts that Dolores waited vainly during those three days for the “ Good-bye ” that had been postponed, but it never came, only an intimation from M. Desprez that she should see the theatricals if by any means it could be arranged, “ And anyhow, Dolly, you shall see the opera. Miss Shore has spoken to me about it,” he said, and then Dolores knew Captain Shore had

not forgotten, and her heart was at rest. She was too young, in mind at least, to attach any meaning to the non-fulfilment of his other words. He had not been able to come, that was quite enough. She was still too near the boundary-line of childhood to be capable of criticising her elders for what they did or left undone.

CHAPTER XIX.

“ Our life is like a curious play
 Where each man hideth from himself ;
 ‘ Let us be open as the day,’
 One mask doth to the other say,
 When he would deeper hide himself.”

VIRGINIA SHORE’S momentary and most unusual absence of mind, which had betrayed itself as she stood talking to her brother, had its root in a letter that was in her pocket.

Its contents had created an undercurrent of thought the whole evening, and had dropped a thin veil between her and others. A slight and filmy one, it is true, but it was rare for her to recognise any diverting medium between herself and the outside world.

This faint consciousness of an interest greater than that about her, was still present when she found herself in the presence of the Princess.

There was some truth in those words that she had let slip, when talking to her brother, the meaning of which had escaped him.

The Princess was not well, or had not been well,

had kept her own rooms now for two days, and, wearying for some society, had sent for Virginia.

"I am much better," she said, in answer to her inquiries; "I was feverish yesterday, but chiefly afraid of not recovering quickly, and so I daresay I have taken more care than was necessary."

"You do not look well," Virginia answered; "it is certainly better to be careful: it would never do to miss M. Desprez's new opera."

The Princess motioned her to a low seat by her side, she herself was reclining in a deep arm-chair; she moved the pillows a little now, so as to sit more upright, and laying aside her book, turned to her companion.

"Now talk to me," she said, "that is what I really want, I am tired of solitude."

She did not look well, as Virginia had remarked, perhaps that was partly owing to the black gown she wore—she so seldom wore black—and this, excepting for the ruffles of lace at throat and wrist, was devoid of colour.

"What shall I tell you about?" Virginia asked. She moved her chair a little, so as to face her companion, and opening her fan, raised it between herself and the fire-blaze.

"Oh, anything," the Princess replied, "everything,—you always have something new to tell." Directly she had spoken, the restless brilliant eyes fell, she moved uneasily, and added quickly, "Tell me about the little girl at the Desprez."

Not a movement had escaped Virginia, it was almost as if she had read those quick-following thoughts; but the summing-up was, "There is one thing upon which I do not wish to hear your comments," and Virginia dared not speak those words which were clamouring for utterance.

"Directly all this is over," the Princess went on, saying the first thing that occurred to her, "I am going to insist on M. Desprez allowing her to sing to me. It is absurd making so much mystery."

"Oh, of course he does not wish her to be heard until she does credit to his teaching. I have had a letter from Elinor Russell—it appears that this girl is a *protégée* of hers—telling me she is coming here by-and-by to see how she is getting on." Virginia slipped her hand into her pocket. "I have the letter," she said, and drew it forth. With it came another, and the two faced her, as she opened the sheet.

Even Virginia Shore was disturbed out of her calmness. She had half intended a casual allusion to the subject-matter of this other letter, but when the bold signature, easy to be read by any one, thus met her unprepared eyes she was silenced.

The Princess recognised the handwriting in a moment; if there had been any doubt before, it was swept away by Virginia's most unusual confusion, and the natural consequence of it was to restore her own calmness; an easy matter, as it was Miss Shore who held the disadvantageous position.

Natural impetuosity is, if not conquered, at least subdued by years of training, however little they may seem to tell—to ignore was no longer possible. Something must be said, it rested with the Princess to say it; her voice was quite calm, helped thereto by the knowledge of Virginia's averted eyes, still bent on the letter she held.

"Yes, I should like to hear Miss Russell's letter, it is long since she has been here. And does Prince Lescynski say what he is doing?"

She said the name quite steadily, though who may guess at what cost? "I beg your pardon," with a nervous little laugh, "but the writing is unmistakable."

"Yes, it is astonishingly bad," Virginia replied, eyeing it critically, and she unfolded the sheet she still held. There was no shadow of her former agitation. "This is a note to my brother." Curiously enough, ignorant of so much as she was, it never struck her that this statement should be disbelieved by her hearer.

"He only writes," lifting her eyes and looking steadily at the Princess, "to say that he is joining some expedition—English—in search of Death or Glory, I suppose. He is not a man who would ever rest quiet for long."

Did she know? Did she approve? Those were the questions that had disturbed her all day, to which she had wished to obtain an answer; and at the critical moment it was annoying to have thus

lost her presence of mind. It had given the Princess just the necessary time in which to recover herself.

Well, it was no use regretting; the subject being opened, it would be better to make some further allusion to it than to quit it too hastily.

"All men like excitement," she added.

"Another word for change, I suppose," the Princess said.

She did not attempt to meet Virginia's eyes, now that they were fixed upon her in their clear brilliancy, but kept her own turned towards the fire.

"Oh, but Prince Lescynski has the love of excitement more marked than most men. He is one of those who would always wish to volunteer for a war, and would then rush forward to do some one else's work. That is only another description of a hero, isn't it?"

"I don't know." The Princess spoke doubtfully. "Every one is so much alike, that those who *are* different from their neighbours——"

"Are very delightful," Virginia interposed, drily, "and unsatisfactory."

The Princess smiled. She was quite at her ease now. "Oh, we do not expect hero-worship from you, Virginia!"

"No, Dolores would be a better exponent of that creed."

"You must bring her to see me one afternoon," the Princess said. The talk had drifted into other

channels, and with such a splendid opportunity, Virginia had failed to discover if Prince Lescynski's movements were known and approved.

She read those few extracts from Miss Russell's letter that bore on Dolores Traherne, and then slipped both letters into the same envelope, with a sensation of having been baffled, which was new and annoying. It was certainly a relief to her, whatever it may have been to the Princess, when the entrance of a servant precluded any more private conversation. He brought a message from his Excellency, who asked permission to enter.

"You are very welcome," the Princess said, kindly.

"You are better, I hope?" he questioned. "It would never do for you to be absent on Tuesday night."

"Oh no! I shall be well enough for that."

"And you, Miss Shore? But it is no use asking after your health; you are never ill or worried or dull, or anything else that other mortals suffer from."

"And which are you, Excellency? There is a tone in that sentence that demands sympathy for one of the three."

"Dull, Miss Shore, but don't repeat it, please. Everything else may be forgiven——"

"Or better still, Excellency, remain undiscovered; but there is a remedy for every disease."

"And how do you cure dulness? Tell me your remedy, and I will try it."

“Oh, mine is a very simple remedy : my mind is an endless diversion to myself, it is so full of nooks and crannies. When necessary, I open one of the corner cupboards, and I am sure to find something therein to pass half an hour with.”

“It is a very simple recipe, is it not, Princess ? Has it been recommended to you, and have you tried it ? But don’t you think, Miss Shore, it requires rather an original person ? I am afraid my corner cupboard would only contain very much the same dust and rubbish as every one else’s.”

“Oh, we are all original,” Virginia answered, lightly, “unless we try to copy some one else.”

“You think the mould is always broken ? I am not sure. I am always coming across people who, I am sure, think just the same foolish thoughts that I do.”

“But they don’t think your wise ones, Excellency.”

“I am converted, Miss Shore. That delicate flattery has convinced me more than the subtlest argument would ever have done.”

The Princess did not join much in the conversation. She listened and smiled at Virginia’s retorts, but her eyes did not reflect her smiles, they wore the unsatisfied expression that was habitual to them.

When the time of parting came, after she had said Good night, and his Excellency had accompanied Miss Shore to the door, she added, as if it were an after-thought, “Please wait, I should like to speak

to you for ten minutes. Sit down," she added, nervously, as he remained standing, as if awaiting what she had to say. He seated himself in the chair from which Virginia had risen, his keen eyes well aware of her restless movements, of the effort it cost her to find the words she sought.

Suddenly, leaning a little forward, opening and closing her fan as she spoke: "Has Prince Lescynski written to you of his intentions?"

It was not what he had expected. Evidently something had reached her—was it rumour, or, all unlikely as it appeared, had he written himself?

"Yes," he said, slowly. As he spoke, the lines on his face seemed to deepen, and show how worn and old he was. "His decision," he added, slowly, "has given me much pain."

"Then it was not your advice?" she asked.

"No, Princess, certainly not."

"Then I suppose it was Virginia's."

"Miss Shore's!" he repeated.

"He writes to her, or," after a second's hesitation, with a little jarring laugh, "to her brother."

"More likely to her brother."

To a woman, the words, the very laugh, might have betrayed so much. To his Excellency, with his preconceived opinions, there was nothing new to learn. On the one side, pride and coldness, which had weighed in the balance what had been offered, and had decided it was not worth the price. On the other, a wild passionate nature

driven to desperation. His sympathies were all with the exile. If this woman had not smiled on him and encouraged his hopes, he would never have stood where he stood now. Almost instinctively his hand sought the spot where lay the letter that had reached him to-night. A few words only, which told the decision which had been arrived at.

"You would try to dissuade me, so I cannot wait to see you. Inaction will kill or madden me. I can only trust to your continued affection, which indeed I cannot afford to lose."

It was an ill-written, blotted little note, having been composed in the train, and bearing the Paris post-mark. There was no chance of recall, when he had opened it this evening, three days lay between now and then.

"Why do you disapprove so strongly, Excellency?" The Princess's voice broke the short silence.

"Because," rising as he spoke, "I think he is worthy of a better fate than a nameless grave in the wilds of Africa." His voice, usually so calm and quiet, was now stirred with feeling, his eyes reflected the pain he felt. "You will excuse me, Princess. I am an old man, and should have learnt more wisdom."

"Good night," she said, almost abruptly, holding out her hand.

He bent over it for a moment, but in silence, and a moment later had left the room.

Alone, she rose to her feet, and walked the length of the room, opening the door into the conservatory, when she reached it, as if with the necessity of prolonging her walk.

She did not pause until she stood by the rose-tree, where he had stood that night. The flowers bloomed now as then, their faint scent making the air heavy and languid around; the little birds, at the sound of her steps, awoke and twittered uneasily in the semi-darkness. Standing where he had stood, she paused, her head bent, and then lifted her arms with a quick despairing gesture.

"Too late!" she said very low, but at her own voice she started, and looked nervously around. She did not linger, but returned to the sitting-room; but once more there, she did not go to the seat by the fire and her novel. She paced up and down the room several times, and then taking out her watch, to which a gold key was attached, opened a queer old coffer that stood on a side-table.

After turning the key, she hesitated still a moment before lifting the lid.

Inside there was an untidy mass of odds and ends, packets of letters, one or two old-fashioned photographs, perhaps relics of some story as faded as themselves; a tiny lace cap—once, long ago, Princess Elvira had had a baby daughter, whose advent had been a disappointment to the husband, counting on an heir. If she had lived—— The Princess sighed to-night as she laid the treasure softly aside.

Perhaps love, apart from any shadow of pride, might have helped to soothe her heart.

A photograph. She lifted it so that the light should fall upon it. Only the photograph of a picture she had once seen, and which had struck her. "The Prisoner" it was called. The interior of a bare stone cell, the faint light from a narrow slit in the wall high overhead, falling on the straw pallet in the corner, the tall man's figure standing motionless in his gay dress, which told of late revels, the lace ruffles torn and disordered, his eyes fixed on the doorway, where, in the narrow aperture of the closing door a face of mockery looked cruelly back at him. Treachery, one felt, as one glanced from the one man to the other, cowardly treachery had placed the one at the mercy of the other, and in the dark ages of which the dress and the prison alike spoke, the fate of the captive was not hard to guess.

She looked at it long. She knew so well of whom the prisoner reminded her, standing thus motionless and silent, because speech was useless, only the passion in his dark eyes betraying the anguish of his soul.

She put it back hastily at length, face downwards, as if she feared to see the expression. Then pushing aside the other things, relics of various landmarks in her life, she came upon something else, an incongruous object amongst its surroundings. The pieces of a broken sword, which caught and reflected the light, as she lifted them from their hiding-place.

For a few minutes she looked at them, conjuring up the past, hearing the tones of his voice, seeing him as he had appeared that terrible night, and then all of a sudden the scene changed, she was watching the masked figure crossing the hall in pursuit of the "Grey Lady," whilst she herself was standing aside looking on.

With a quick movement she replaced the sword whence she had taken it.

"You said a great deal more than you meant," she thought, "people always do when they are in the wrong; you have transferred your allegiance, and have taken your sword elsewhere: it has not taken you long to repent of your folly!"

She turned the key, and then noted that in her haste she had cut her hand, probably with the sharp edge of the sword.

"An ill omen," she thought, as she bound it up, "but it was stupid to touch it."

As his Excellency drove home through the starlit night, it was of that letter he was still thinking, useless as any remonstrance would now be, he could not rest until he had answered it.

"The impatience of youth," he sighed. And his thoughts turned to the career which in his spare moments he had been planning for him,—and now to adopt instead the chances of a stray shot, in an unknown, far-off land, and to have placed these barriers of time and space between them. Old age

seemed catching him up unexpectedly as he left his brougham and walked up-stairs.

"Now if I had adopted Virginia Shore as a daughter instead of Dorislaus Lescynski as a son," he thought, and smiled at the thought, as he lit a cigarette, and took up a pen, "how differently I should be feeling! Her teaching would have been invaluable at such a moment. I can quite imagine her saying to me, 'On looking back, don't you feel that it would have been better if you had sat with your feet on the fender, and had cared for nothing? How much more comfortable you would have felt to-night!'"

He almost heard the clear incisive voice.

"Good teaching, Miss Shore," he found himself replying, "for keeping the wrinkles out of your face, but I am too old to profit by it. It keeps life at comedy-level, of course, and that is more amusing both for actors and lookers-on, for tragedy is often dull."

He threw down the pen he had taken up, and began quickly pacing up and down the room. "I wonder why that is? I suppose," with something like a sigh, "because the parts are often too big for the actors. Sad that, but still there are elements of greatness in the dullest tragedy, whereas a comedy, however agreeable it may be, calls for little but clever mimicry or adaptability in the actors, and leaves them much as it found them; *it* does not bring wrinkles," laughing at his own idea, as he

again began his letter, "no wonder it is more popular!"

"MY DEAR DORISLAUS,—I only feel inclined to blame, and what is the use of that? for, after all, it may be that you are right and I wrong. Age is so apt to infer that its decisions are correct, merely because it has the advantage or disadvantage of experience. Inaction of course would be folly, but I had hoped a career nearer home might have been found. Old men are entitled to their fancies, and it does not please me to think of you so far away. Put that down to the loneliness of old age; I must content myself with the knowlege that what is good for the body rarely is for the soul,—that we all learn, as we plod on our way. Do not let me remain in ignorance of your whereabouts. I am not accustomed to giving good advice, which every one tells me is always useless, but if you were my son, I should be inclined to add that it is the manner in which we fulfil the destiny that often we do not choose, that forms our soul.

"ERNEST VON REICHHOFEN."

CHAPTER XX.

“The silent forces of the world
Time, Change, and Fate, deride us still.”

It was Tuesday, the first night of M. Desprez's new Opera. The pretty theatre was crowded, not a vacant place anywhere, and the effect was brilliant, every one being present who in any way represented rank or fashion in the little capital.

To one dark-eyed girl it was a vision of unimagined splendour.

“I have got a place for Dolores,” M. Desprez announced on one of his hurried appearances at his home—“the Herzheims will take her. I believe, Dolores, when it comes to the moment of starting, Emilie will be jealous, and sorry she is not going.”

Since that moment M. Desprez had not returned. Emilie had superintended Dolores's toilet, and had herself taken her to her chaperons, and had stood at the door watching her drive off on the back seat of the fly, with Monsieur and Madame Herzheim very comfortably filling up the opposite side. They were kindly people, Madame had been a public singer,

and they both sympathised with the girl's evident excitement.

She was far too much excited to talk, and when she was fairly established between Monsieur and Madame in the dress circle, they left her to amuse herself, chattering freely meantime over her head to each other. Their comments served to enlighten Dolores when information was needed, otherwise she scarcely heeded them. They had good places in the front row on one side, so that the royal box—as yet untenanted—faced them.

The stalls were filled with men in uniform. Dolores looked from one to the other, striving to distinguish him to whom she knew she owed this wonderful moment, but it was difficult in such a crowd to feel assured.

At last there was a little flutter and stir of excitement, the occupants of the royal box had entered, and at the same moment sounded the first bar of the overture.

Those in the parterre looked up, many rose from their places to obtain a better view; a man, seated almost exactly beneath, lifted his head, giving to Dolores, watching from above, a distinct view of a straight profile and blond moustache, which enlightened her as to the exact whereabouts of Captain Jerome Shore.

“Is that the Princess?” she questioned, under her breath, touching Madame Herzheim's sleeve; but there was no need to ask, no need for the acquies-

cent nod, that vision of radiant beauty opposite could be no one else. Princess Elvira's photographs were a common sight in Ingelheim, Dolores knew them well, though a photograph gave no idea of the brilliance of her colouring.

To-night she was looking particularly well. The traces of languor and ill-health had vanished. To the girlish observer she was a radiant vision in white and gold, the velvet of her gown scarcely whiter than her arms and neck, the great bouquet of tawny lilies she carried scarcely more golden than the red gold of her hair. Virginia Shore, also in white, some softly falling silky material, was a shadowy, slender maiden by her side.

"But Miss Shore is lovely too," Dolores thought, with loyal admiration, as her eyes for a moment sought the other woman, "and she looks happier, she smiles more."

Yes, Virginia's smiles came readily enough, and her words too. In every pause of the music the Princess turned to her, and generally in response to Virginia's speeches there was a passing smile.

There were other occupants of the box. His Excellency—Dolores recognised the white hair and keen eyes of the old man—and another gentleman, a glittering apparition in blue and gold; but they were of very little interest compared with the two women.

And it was not only in Dolores's eyes that they were worthy of admiration. By all those present it was felt. When Captain Shore looked up and

saw the brilliant group above, his next words to his companion were not a continuation of those that had gone before.

"How well the Princess is looking to-night!"

"Yes, she grows more beautiful every day," the other answered. "What has become of Lescynski?" with a sudden apparent chain of ideas. He smiled as he spoke, but there was no answering smile from Jerome.

"He talks of taking service in some out-of-the-way English expedition."

"He was always restless," his friend replied, carelessly, "but somehow I half expected to see him to-night. On these occasions he was generally in some dark corner looking on."

Captain Shore said no more; the subject was evidently not of vital importance to his companion, who, however, added, a moment later, in a lower tone, "I had heard that Prince Adelbert was to be here to-night."

"So had I," Jerome assented, "but I suppose his non-appearance is a contradiction of all the rumours."

"I suppose so." His companion spoke slowly, as if half inclined to disagree, "But it would be a brilliant match for her."

"Yes. For myself, I don't believe that as long as the boy is a minor she will ever marry."

"But *now* is the time to prepare for *then*."

"Perhaps, but from what I know of her, I don't think she ever thinks of *then*, as you call it. This,"

vaguely glancing round, "is what she enjoys,—and, after all, it is rather difficult to look forward and foresee one's self in a different set of circumstances."

Sometimes Jerome had flashes of intuition, which served him almost as well as the more careful analysis of his sister. To Virginia the character of the Princess was well known. Long and intimate study had granted her an insight of the strong and weak places of her nature. She knew well that there was no provident looking forward and arranging for the future, such as a splendid marriage would provide in these days, a marriage easily to be bought by beauty.

Prince Adelbert, though a widower and no longer young, was a man whose hand would lift her into an assured position, which would be no longer hers when the little son should cease to be a child, and she past her youth and beauty.

But to Princess Elvira it was the present that dazzled, the future was too far off to terrify. To picture herself past her prime, her power, such as it was, set aside by a reigning Prince, her beauty, perhaps a forgotten dream, was beyond her capabilities. So far Virginia's careful study and Jerome's intuition were in accord, but the careful study had taught the woman there was another factor in Princess Elvira's character which must in the summing-up be taken into account. Gusts of passion, unaccustomed to acknowledging a check—sudden overpowering storms, which might at any moment tear down the slight shelters of vanity or pride.

Such a one, she was assured, had raged, was raging now, for to her clear sight and cool head was evident the temporary nature of the seeming calmness which reigned, and which imposed on all around.

To-night, for instance, Virginia found herself constantly wondering what was really stirring under that outwardly quiet demeanour. This evening must speak of so many other similar occasions—she could almost see the memory rise, and be pushed aside in the sudden turn of the head, and glance of the restless eyes, which sought her own, to note if she were on the alert.

There was a touch of fever still, Virginia fancied, which gave added brilliance to the sapphire eyes, a faint shade of colour to the pale cheeks. “And she certainly is thinner,” she found herself almost wondering, as she noted the change. To one of her temperament it was impossible even to imagine the wild storm that had shaken the other, the moments—hours—which had left their mark upon her.

To-night whilst Virginia noted and made her comments, comments of which the Princess was uneasily aware, there was a passionate anger in her heart that something was omitted, which rendered this evening inferior in satisfaction to others that she could recall.

She was looking beautiful, of that she was assured, and if she had doubted, the glances of those around would have settled the question. And here was the

consummation of her wishes: it had always hitherto sufficed, it had been to retain this—the outward semblance of the slight power she held—that she had foregone any other narrower, simpler life, that might have been hers. To-night perhaps, as she sat there in the pride of her beauty, the doubt for the first time, “Was it well done?” entered into her heart; the question first arose, “Had the gain been worth the loss?”

Each time the doubt obtruded itself she turned to Virginia, putting it imperiously aside. Instinctively at such a moment there was a consciousness of moral support in her companion’s cynical remarks.

The doctrine of the “World well lost” need never be feared from Virginia’s words or acts. And this not because she would have recommended a sacrifice of abiding happiness for outward show, but because she would not have understood what was meant by the former.

“Words, words,” she would have felt, and would have recommended the tangible goods of which she could have grasped the measurement.

Could she have understood, perchance she would have despised the hesitation. To have what you want within your reach, and to hesitate and lose it—or to refuse it, and then regret—would alike have been impossible to her clear mind and calm judgment.

Often judgment fails in comprehension, where willing sympathy might have succeeded better.

Through the heart is a surer channel often than through the brain.

But at such a time Virginia Shore's companionship was a solace, and in talking to her Princess Elvira forgot for the moment the homage that on so many similar occasions she had always felt sure of meeting with, from a pair of sad dark eyes, that only seemed to lighten in answer to her smiles.

But if amongst those present there were some to whom other thoughts obscured the full charm of the music, the grace and vivacity of the acting, there was one to whom it was all in all, one to whom no second thought came, and who suspected such absence of mind in no one else.

The laughter and applause that greeted each development of the play, the ready enthusiastic reception of each melody, were to their creator's ear the consummation of his wishes.

He had never really feared failure, but the certainty of success smoothed away any shadow of care these last weeks had brought. He knew his audience so well — for them he wrote — he could tell almost the very points of his Operetta that would meet with their special approbation. In his own opinion, this musical trifle was the most perfect of its kind that he had yet attempted, and his opinion was evidently not at fault. The public taste indorsed it.

There were no wandering looks towards the Princess's box, and the fine ladies who graced the theatre,

as the music proceeded. Silence, entranced silence, whilst the actress gave additional point and charm to the pretty taking airs which would soon be on the lips of every inhabitant of Ingelheim, then bursts of applause, which grew more and more enthusiastic as the play progressed, until at last, when the curtain fell on the heroine, smiling and flushed in the midst of countless bouquets, tributes to the sweetness of her voice and the grace of her acting, there were cries for the author.

“Author, author!” they called; and, as there was still delay, “Desprez!” some one shouted from the gallery, “Desprez!” and in answer M. Desprez, smiling, radiant, appeared, bowing his acknowledgments, touched by the applause and excitement, until the tears stood in his eyes, in response to the eager cries of the crowd.

He did not speak; truth to tell, it may be doubted if his voice would have been under control: the overwork and excitement of the previous days had exhausted him, and at this, the zenith of his triumph, he felt tears of excitement and gratified pride dimming his eyes, and rendering unsteady his voice.

Some one in the gallery, the same some one who had called upon him by name, now cried it out again, “Desprez!” and, as he spoke, threw with careful aim a great bouquet, which fell at his feet. He stooped and lifted it, a mass of snowdrops, his initial “D” in the centre in violets.

A slip of paper attached to it told him it was

from "Friends in the Gallery." He looked thence and bowed again; it gratified him always afresh to recognise how much he was beloved and admired by the workers in his adopted home. It was the certain gauge of his popularity, the one sure means by which he tested his success.

To-night these snowdrops he held in his hand were the sign that he stood securer than ever.

Before the curtain again fell, the Princess rose, lifting her golden lilies.

"But you must throw them, Count," she said, turning to the man behind, "I——" her voice faltered, the sentence ending in trailing unaccustomed vagueness—a mist came before her eyes which blotted out the stage, the radiant actress smiling below, even M. Desprez's imposing, well-satisfied face and form.

She sat down, scarce heeding what she did, while her own words conjured up another scene. Just such another night, the roses she had then held—the momentary solitude and silence in the semi-darkened box, when passionate dark eyes had looked into hers, eyes under which her own had fallen, and then—no longer silence and solitude, . . . but Virginia's clear voice and presence—now as then, it was at hand, to warn her from self-betrayal.

For a moment it was difficult, so strong and clear had the vision been, to dis sever then from now. Count Fernhof was leaning forward—a slight, boyish, fair-haired figure, holding the gold lilies in

his hand, and Virginia was offering advice on the throw. But it was not needed; the flowers which had been in the Princess's hand during the evening, lay at the feet of the hero of the night, and when he left the stage, it was the golden lilies of the Princess and the snowdrops of his humbler admirers that Charles Desprez carried away with him.

His eyes had sought out Dolores: he knew where she was, and her heart filled with loving tenderness when she was made aware of his recognition, of the little distinct bow with which he favoured her, standing there as he was for the moment at the very height of his triumph. It filled to overflowing the cup of her gratitude, and would never be forgotten in all the years to come. A child's warm, loving heart is so easily enslaved; early impressions, remembered kindnesses, would always stand forward and overshadow any clearer knowledge of M. Desprez's character, which the calmer judgment of older years might bring. She had no words wherewith to express her thanks to those she was with. In a dream she followed her companions, holding Madame's hand as she made her way in the wake of her husband's burly form,—the whole evening had been too unreal in its splendour for her as yet to distinguish it from other dreams. Perhaps Madame Herzheim recognised the cause of her silence, guessed the rapture that was filling the girl, for she left her unheeded as they jolted home in the fly, pouring forth to her husband her flood of talk, comments,

and applause, and it was only when they drew up opposite the villa that she addressed the girl.

"You have enjoyed it very much, I am sure," she said, "one does not hear such music, or see such a sight every day. Now you must wake up and give me the key, so that we may see you safely into the house."

Dolores put the key into Monsieur Herzheim's hand, but while he went on to open the door, she lingered by Madame's side, as if striving to word her gratitude.

"But "Thank you, thank you," was all she could say. "For taking me," she added; "it was M. Desprez who arranged it, I know," as Madame began some sentences to that effect.

"He *is* kind—I shall never forget." She said nothing more, but in the sudden silence flung her arms round Madame's neck and kissed her. The kiss was heartily returned.

"Good night, dear, you must come and see me one day. My daughters are all married, but you must come and talk to me; I daresay we shall manage to understand one another."

She nodded and smiled until Dolores had disappeared into the house.

"She is a nice little thing," she remarked to her husband, "we must get Desprez to let her come and see us. He thinks a great deal of her voice—I should like to hear her sing."

Dolores was glad when she stood in the passage

to find there was no one awaiting her, Emilie probably had gone to bed. She listened a moment at her door in passing, but all was silent. She was glad, because commonplace remarks would have been impossible, she was far too much excited even to formulise all she had seen and heard. Sleep was out of the question, whilst visions flitted through her over-tired brain. The Princess in her wonderful beauty, with the restless dissatisfied look that had even impressed the girlish watcher. The wonders of the stage, the voice and charm of the actress, the sweet melodies which were echoing in her ears; the brilliance of stage and audience. She tossed from side to side, unable to banish it all from her tired eyes. And over and above all the memory of the kind thought that had procured for her such delight—the equally kind thought that had remembered her, his pupil, at such a moment, overshadowed all else.

The new life was fast eclipsing the old. Jerome Shore and Charles Desprez stood forth side by side, as the benefactors of to-day, to them her allegiance, so easily bought, was given. And close beside her, where she could see it whenever she turned her head, was the picture of the steady eyes under their straight brows, the strong square shoulders of Jem Traherne. It is certainly a truth that love may be given, but cannot be bought.

Dolores's brain was scarcely more over-excited than that of Charles Desprez when he at length found

himself opposite his own door. The theatre closed, there had been congratulations to give and receive, and a supper-party held in town in his honour. All his previous fatigue had been swept away in the excitement of the moment. These were times when he shone amongst his fellows. He was always good-tempered and ready for any amusement, his health and strength were unvarying; he could work by day, and enjoy himself at night, in a way that was a source of envy to his friends.

To-night had been no exception, and in much good-fellowship the time had passed so swiftly, that he was surprised to find how late it was when he arrived at the villa.

It must be late, for all the fires and lights were out, even in his own library it was quite dark. Odd, because as a rule, however late he might be, Emilie was always there, awaiting him. Though she would not be present on these first nights, she was always ready to listen to the recital of his triumphs on his return.

It sent a slight chill to his excitement and enthusiasm when he found himself in the darkened chamber. He struck a match, and lit the candles on the table,—the light accentuated the dreariness of the room, and he gave a little shiver as he noticed the disorder—the ashes in the fireplace. To one of his nature the absence of a sympathising listener at such a crisis of his career was almost pain. Personal sympathy was as necessary to his moral

existence as fresh air to his physical—without the one, as without the other, life would be impossible.

The flickering light from the candles showed him a letter lying on the table: almost mechanically he took it up, no thought of its possible contents in his mind as he tore it open, the actual sense of physical discomfort was too strong to admit of any other sensation.

But when he had opened the letter, and had glanced through it, familiar as was the writing, simple as were the words, his brain refused to understand it. And yet the meaning was so clear, there were no two readings possible.

Emilie had left him. Under the care of a friend she had that very day been married in a neighbouring town to Antoine Lütz, and to-night with him had left her home.

No excuses, no further words, no address even, only one short pleading line—"Try to forgive me," and then the new strange signature.

For a few moments after reading it M. Desprez was simply stunned, but when thought rushed back, it was still that sense of intense physical discomfort of which he felt most conscious. The letter itself, with the momentous fact it contained, was scarcely realisable, except as the medium of the chilliness and misery from which he was suffering. It seemed such bitter irony that this should be the end of the triumphs of the evening, that a malicious fate should have been in waiting just when he stood at the very

highest point of success and popularity to which he had ever attained. A sort of dull anger took possession of him at the thought of being thus abandoned.

"She for whom I have done everything," he said bitterly, throwing the letter down, and pacing angrily about the room.

"My life has been sacrificed to her—I have denied her nothing—and because I have stood between her and certain assured misery, this is my reward."

Tears came into his eyes at his own words; with the applause of the evening still echoing in his ears, it was more than ever impossible to rightly estimate his own wisdom or folly in the matter.

"I never denied her anything," he repeated, weakly, forgetting entirely the last five years of constant denial, the very insistence with which he had put aside all mention of the unwelcome subject, only conscious of the act of rebellion that had left him thus deserted.

He did not register any rash vow, as under similar circumstances another man might have done,—it was scarcely so much anger he felt, as a weak regret that it should have come to pass that at any cost this dreadful hour had not been prevented.

Physically tired, mentally tired, he sat on hour after hour in his easy-chair by the burnt-out ashes of the fire, while a chain of useless fears and wishes passed through his mind. Dread of the morrow, and the comments of the world, anger against the

man who had persuaded her to such a step, and mingled with it all, a pitiful longing for the gentle comfort and sympathy which Emilie had never failed to offer, whenever he had stood in need of such offerings. It was her presence, with its accustomed soothing effect on irritated nerves, that he longed for in a way which set her quite apart from the daughter who had deserted him. That was the word that clung most to his memory.

At last, the first faint shadow of dawn stealing in through the unshuttered windows aroused him. He rose from his seat with a new strong desire at his heart to sleep, and put hours of forgetfulness between himself and the moment of receiving the letter. The candles were flickering down to the last: he lifted one, so as to see where he had thrown those lines when he had read them, it would be as well to make sure that they met no other eyes. There lay the letter, and close beside it, two bouquets which he had brought home with him; the gold lilies of the Princess, and the great mass of snowdrops from his humble friends—emblems of his previous night's triumph.

He stared at them as if he were in a dream; was it possible that only a few hours ago, he had been standing thus at the crowning point of his career, and that it was he, Charles Desprez, whose image now looked back at him from the mirror above the glass. This face, seen by the unflattering light of early dawn and expiring candle, with

its lines and wrinkles and disordered hair, the shadow of old age already falling across it.

He blew out the candle, and picking up the note hurried up-stairs—the necessity for sleep and forgetfulness stronger than ever. It was not of Emilie he was thinking—for the moment she was entirely forgotten, in the foreshadowing of that future that had looked over his shoulder just now, and had met his eyes in the mirror.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ Youth is the gift of the gods. Experience is only the lesson of life.”

THE news of Emilie Desprez's marriage and departure furnished food for a nine days' talk in Ingelheim. Coming as it did in conjunction with the triumphant success of her father, it could not fail to be the topic of conversation in every drawing-room—nay, at every street corner.

Sympathising friends of all classes had each one a word to offer on the subject, and it almost seemed as if this domestic misfortune was to be the means of cementing the last stone in M. Desprez's tower of fame. It gave the personal link which is always pleasing, and brought him in touch with every one's sympathy.

And he did not shut himself up or stand aloof; the tears would steal into his eyes as some old friend or new acquaintance would offer the silent sympathy of a handshake, or outspoken vehement-voiced denunciation of daughter or unsuccessful pupil.

“My only daughter, and we have been everything to each other for so long. These many years of loneliness that we have been all in all to each other.” And the shaken voice and tear-dimmed eyes were the outward signs of what he felt; it was that susceptibility which never acted, but always was the victim of the moment’s emotion, which put him so completely in accord with the whole world.

“If it were not for you, Dolores,” he would say, when he entered his forsaken home, “my dear little adopted daughter, I think I should never have lived through it. Do not leave me; come down into the study and sit with me while I smoke my pipe; I am too unhappy to be left alone.”

And Dolores, silent and shy, unable to speak out the overpowering sympathy that possessed her, touched by the kindness that turned to her for help, would take her work and seat herself on the opposite side of the fireplace, listening to his words until, the pipe over, it would be time for the smoker to make his way to the theatre.

When the door had closed behind him, Dolores would sob on in sorrow and pity, until some chance movement aroused her. The maid coming in to tell her supper was ready perhaps. She would rouse herself then, and eat a little with small appetite, but willing to please the servant, who was sorry for the foreigner in the unhappy house; and then she would creep to bed, as often as not to cry

herself to sleep, for in addition to the heartache for the father, there was the ever-present loss of Emilie's kind presence.

And meanwhile M. Desprez, soothed by his dinner and his pipe, and the little confidential talk to the sympathising listener, was driving in his comfortable brougham to the theatre, where adulation, appreciation, excitement, everything his soul most loved, awaited him.

It would be folly to let Care vanquish him, if by any means she could be bought off. Life was short, and should be happy, or at the least comfortable; to put aside what troubled was often a certain step towards forgetfulness. Events soon lose their sharp outlines unless we ourselves take the trouble to keep them clear-cut; and the incense of applause was a softening medium, which he gladly made use of. A fortnight later, Emilie and her husband were distinctly less vivid figures on his mental landscape than charming Mdlle. Estella, his *prima donna*, or the great people who had flocked into the little capital to listen to his music, and do homage to its creator.

At the weekly reception at the Palace, the Princess was especially and noticeably gracious, sending for him and speaking to him a long time, showing in every way her sorrow for the domestic trial that had befallen him.

"I am going to ask a favour, M. Desprez. Do not say 'granted' until you hear what it is, for I fear it

is a great one. I am going to ask if I may be allowed to hear your little English pupil sing."

And as there was a moment's hesitation, "Oh, I know the objection, of course; but one song, just one, with only Miss Shore and I to criticise."

"How can I say 'No,' your Highness?"

"It *is* impossible," she assented; "but I have been very patient, and in such a short time we shall be leaving Ingelheim, and when we return, why, I suppose it will no longer be possible to hear her, except on the stage."

M. Desprez smiled. He was not altogether displeased. With the prospect of the long absence of the Court, it would do no harm for Dolores to have won a little place in the Princess's remembrance for herself beforehand.

"Your Highness will take into consideration that she is young and very shy, but I do not think you will be disappointed in her voice. It is as sweet as a nightingale's."

She told Virginia afterwards what she had done, "Principally because I am sorry for M. Desprez. I am also curious, perhaps," she added, "I hear of this girl from every one, it seems to me. Arrange it, please," she said, as she turned away. "One afternoon that she is with you, bring her to me."

And of course Virginia agreed.

"Yes, I will arrange it. I have not seen her myself for some time; I should think she would rejoice at any prospect of escaping from M. Desprez." The

Princess had moved away—this latter speech was addressed to his Excellency.

“Why?”

“Can you ask? Can you not imagine M. Desprez posing as the deserted father on his lonely hearth-stone in the intervals—I am sure short ones—of coming forth to be crowned with laurels?”

“Ah, Miss Shore, you are, I fear, so imbued with theatrical instincts at present, that you cannot discern between reality and fancy.”

“You doubt my sketch?”

“I doubt your interpretation of it. I don’t believe in M. Desprez posing.”

“Don’t you, Excellency? Your charity reproves me.” She said nothing for a moment, and then added suddenly, “Why, if Miss Desprez had done this five years ago, she would now have long passed the stage of being forgiven and brought back again.”

“Do you think that is the usual termination of domestic difficulties?”

“The usual termination of all difficulties, I am inclined to believe, Excellency,—we live in a very forgiving world.”

“There are exceptions, however.”

“Yes, Excellency.” Virginia’s clear eyes met the old man’s straight. “And what happens then?”

“Ah, Miss Shore, who can answer that question? I cannot. Charity’s mantle, I suppose, needs to be very large for all that it is required to cover, and one cannot make it do more than it will.”

"Did Jerome show you the letter he received?" she asked,—the old man's vague reply should not deter her from her question.

"Yes." The voice was sad, very unlike the usual bantering tones in which he addressed her. "It grieved me. Possibly it was your advice he acted on, but excuse me, I do not think it was well given. A better career might still have been found."

"*My* advice?" Virginia replied quickly. "I should never have offered anything I esteem so highly to any one in such a state that he would not be the least likely to profit by it."

"The Princess," his eyes sought the ground, his voice fell, "the Princess, I believe, is also of the same opinion."

In those last words Virginia gained one piece of knowledge of which she had been in search. The Princess knew, and disapproved of the action he had taken. He had not told her himself, or she would have known that it was not she, Virginia, who had suggested his present career,—from whom then had she gained the information? From his Excellency most probably, and if such were the case, her anger must be subsiding.

There was a light here thrown on a difficult problem which, when she was alone, she would essay to solve.

Perhaps it was the natural desire to see the fulfilment of her own prophecy which prompted the few

words that passed between her and M. Desprez later on that same evening.

She had prefaced her conversation by asking after Dolores.

"I have been very busy with my rehearsals,—you can sympathise, I am sure, M. Desprez,—or I should have sent for her before. But to-morrow, in the afternoon, if you can send her, my maid shall take her back."

And M. Desprez at once acquiesced. "I am afraid it is very lonely for her," he added.

"Yes," Virginia spoke hesitatingly, as if she had something further to add—and noting it, M. Desprez waited, as if anxious to hear it. "But you are not going to prove the implacable father of romance, I am sure," she said. "Some things are hard to get over," she went on, in that low clear voice which always seemed to bring every word into relief, "but as in most other difficulties, *ce n'est que le premier pas que coûte*. Besides, we have not studied in the school of philosophy for nothing."

M. Desprez sighed. "And when one has an *only* daughter——" he began—

"And therefore can only have one son-in-law," Miss Shore interposed, "one must make the best of him." M. Desprez left after those last words. When he had departed, his Excellency took his place.

"Miss Shore, I trust,"—his previous sadness had given place to his usual light words,—“I trust you have not been fanning the flame of parental anger.

There was something in your expression that made me suspicious."

"On the contrary, Excellency, I have laid the first stone of the bridge by which Madame Antoine Lütz will return home."

"What sort of a stone was it, I am curious to know."

"A good solid foothold, Excellency. M. Desprez and I have attended the same school, and we learnt there that there is nothing worse for the digestion than the encouragement of evil temper, and that furthermore the secret of eternal youth lies in the digestion,—and neither he nor I," smiling, "wish to grow prematurely old."

"I never knew, Miss Shore," his Excellency returned, "that philosophy was of so much practical use—when you open a school for its instruction, you must take me for a pupil."

It had been decided between M. Desprez and Miss Shore, that Dolores should not know beforehand of the trial of her fortitude that was in store for her. "She will sing much better if she has not been suffering long hours of nervousness first."

And M. Desprez had fully agreed.

"Besides," added Virginia, "people are not always to be depended on—when the time comes something new may have occurred, and the visit may be postponed." All of which reasoning convinced M. Desprez of the advisability of silence.

So when Dolores knocked at the now familiar door the following afternoon, there was no greater nervousness to be overcome than was usual on entering these enchanted rooms.

"Come in," some one called, and she opened the door and entered boldly, though no one was visible, for the guardian dog was also absent.

"Ah, it is you, Fraulein," Thérèse said. "I am waiting to take you to another room where Miss Shore will meet you. You can take off your hat first."

When Dolores had laid aside hat and cloak, she accompanied Thérèse, on what seemed a long walk through various narrow passages, until finally they came out in another part of the house. The grand central staircase was facing them, with its sweet blooming flowers at every turn—and here Thérèse stopped.

"That room," she said, pointing to the door by which they stood. "You can go straight in, and if Miss Shore is not there, just sit down, and wait till she appears. There will be books and pictures," she added kindly, "if you have long to wait. They will amuse you."

Dolores, unquestioning in thought, obedient always, did as the maid told her. She gave a little low knock, and waited a second, then opened the door, and before entering, gave a smile to Thérèse, who was looking after her encouragingly.

The room was large and handsome, apparently a library, for its walls were lined with low shelves

fitted with books. But its austerity was diminished by the bright green of a small fernery into which it led, the doors of which were open, and also by tables filled with books, but oddly out of accord with the dark-covered serious volumes on the shelves. These were of all sorts, volumes of poetry, illustrated copies of well-known works, children's books, and mingled with these a child's open copy-book, containing some laboriously written lines, and various other signs of rudimentary learning.

It was in fact the first room in the private suite of the Princess, and though it was dignified by the title of library or study, it was used but little in these days for either purpose.

When Dolores stood within the room, which she had believed to be empty, she discovered such was not the case. At the opening of the door there was a sound, and from the embrasure of the window appeared a slight fair-haired boy. He looked at her a second as if in doubt, and then approached, his hand held out in welcome. Dolores took the proffered hand, and looked down at the small grave face. There was a faint shadowy question on it, to which she answered, "I am to wait here for Miss Shore."

"She is there," the child replied, pointing to a door before which hung a heavy curtain, "with my mother."

"Then I must wait, I suppose," Dolores answered. She spoke as seriously as the little boy had done,

but there is a freemasonry in childhood, and Dolores had not yet passed sufficiently beyond it to have forgotten its signs.

In a few minutes she was talking easily, happily ; it was almost like returning to the home of her childhood, so swiftly did tongue and brain suit themselves to her little hearer.

He was a pretty child—perhaps six years old—with bold blue eyes, and soft gold curls that lay on his white forehead.

She was not thinking of his appearance much, except that it was pretty and engaging, or she would have recalled where she had seen those same brilliant eyes.

But her thoughts were elsewhere, or were transported elsewhere immediately by the childish voice, now earnest and pleading—

“Are you busy ? No, you will help me ?”

So speaking, the little hand clasped hers, and led her to the window, whence he had risen at her approach.

“I have been trying, trying,” he exclaimed emphatically, pointing to some queer bricks and a pattern picture, “but I cannot build a house like that.”

“Shall I try ?”

“Yes, do. Take the stool,” he said politely, but when Dolores had seated herself, and was pondering over the picture, he sat down on the floor beside her, ready with eager suggestions.

"It is all wrong," Dolores said, gravely. "We must knock it down and begin again."

"Yes." He looked wistfully at the unsuccessful attempt, and then, with a brave push, knocked it over. "Now," he said, with ready faith glancing towards Dolores, "now you begin."

And Dolores began. As the tower mounted, he grew more and more excited, and at last, as the final storey was laid, he came nearer still, standing up behind her, laying his little hand on her shoulder. Neither of them heard the curtain pushed back, was aware that some one had entered the room, until Miss Shore stood beside them.

"You must come now, Dolores. No," as the child began pleading for a moment's delay, "not now. She must come with me."

Dolores's thoughts were still divided between the castle in building and the new-comer, but she at once rose obediently.

"The Princess has sent for you, Dolores," Miss Shore went on. "I am going to take you to her," and at the tightening clasp on the hand she held, "you need not be frightened," she said kindly, "you are going to sing something for us: we shall not be nearly as alarming as Herr Laurentius."

As she spoke, she drew the girl towards the curtained doorway, and Dolores—scarcely able to realise the full terrors of the situation—accompanied her unresistingly.

The child—the young Prince, as she now knew

him to be—walked beside her, holding back the curtain with quiet courtesy, as she and Miss Shore approached.

“Make a curtsy,” Virginia whispered,—she still held the small trembling hand,—and Dolores, scarcely knowing what she was about, found herself in that room with its many beauties of art,—its lovely view over the waters of the lake, its glimpse of flowers in the conservatory beyond,—the same room in which Prince Lescynski had told the story of his youth.

But the surroundings passed almost unobserved, certainly unnoticed, as she dropped a little frightened curtsy. All she was aware of was the beauty of the lady in the low chair by the fire.

She had thought in the theatre that she had never seen any one as beautiful, but it seemed as if in this less brilliant setting the beauty was even more remarkable.

She was dressed in a long plain gown of dead white, bordered with white fur, the only colour two quaint sapphire clasps, fastening it at throat and waist.

The rich red-gold hair, plaited in two thick plaits reaching to the ground, caught and held the sun’s rays, which now at sunset flooded the room. Admiration almost conquered timidity, there was no hiding what she felt. The Princess smiled as she met the wondering admiration in the sweet dark eyes.

"You are going to sing something to me," she said kindly; "it was very nice of M. Desprez to send you."

At the words, memory rushed back of all the injunctions she had received, and despite the warning pressure of Miss Shore's hand, she began some faltering words about her promise to M. Desprez.

"Oh, but that is all right," the Princess said, in her curious slow voice, speaking English, but with a slight accent; "M. Desprez has been asked, and has granted permission."

And so great was the immediate relief, that it banished the fear of the approaching moment, a moment which, after all, did not prove so very alarming. Miss Shore opened the piano, and Dolores, standing behind her, sang in her pure young voice a couple of well-known songs out of an oratorio, that she had been studying with M. Desprez.

The little Prince had seated himself on a low stool by the side of the Princess, and seated thus, the likeness between the two was wonderfully striking.

Under the influence of the music, he sobered down to suitable gravity, and, folding his hands, sat as quiet and grave as his mother; but his laughing blue eyes now and then betrayed the gaiety of his heart, as they wandered round the room, or followed the movements of a cage of birds in the window.

As they sat thus, the listeners were hidden from

Virginia; to the Princess there was relief in the knowledge, there was an absence of constraint in the certainty that no criticising eyes were watching her, as she listened to those pure high notes which fell on her ear, true and sweet as the song of a bird.

Yes, certainly M. Desprez had not over-promised; Herr Laurentius had not over-prophe-sied! The voice was there, and under its charm life, with its difficulties and scarcely acknowledged needs, slipped away, and a delicious dream took its place, a dream in which there were no contending desires, in which all sweet possibilities were granted, and no price demanded.

It was with a start she came out of the dream at the cessation of the music, the touch of her little son's hand, his low whisper of praise.

"The English lady sings very beautifully, mother; does she not?" he murmured, and then, with that quaint formal manner which sat so oddly on his laughing baby face, he walked over to the piano, and thanked her.

"Can the lady sing another song?" he asked. "Her singing has pleased us very much."

"Not to-day," the Princess said, rousing herself. "Miss Shore is engaged," with a glance at the clock, "indeed it is already late; but perhaps Miss Traherne will come another afternoon."

"I hope so," he said, as Virginia closed the piano. "Perhaps," he looked wistfully from the one to the

other, "perhaps, if you are not busy, Miss Traherne, you could now finish building the tower?"

"Oh," Virginia laughed, "you ought to succeed, you are so persistent."

He coloured a little at the words, but did not turn his eyes from Dolores.

"It is very difficult," he said; "and I want to see it finished—it will not take long now."

And when she had explained the matter to the Princess, the latter said, "If Miss Traherne can spare the time, it will be very kind of her."

And at the assent, he slipped his little hand into that of Dolores, and began trying to draw her away.

"It has been a great treat," the Princess said, as Dolores stood by Miss Shore's side, "your voice is lovely. I hope M. Desprez will be so good as to let you come again."

Dolores faltered out some word of thanks, the red coming and going in her cheeks. The singing had not been half such an ordeal as answering the comments afterwards. She was thankful to find Miss Shore taking her to the door, still more thankful when the heavy curtain had fallen on the other side, and she found herself alone with the little Prince.

"I am very glad we are going to finish this," he said, his eyes brightening as they rested on the building in the low window-seat. "It is a pity, don't you think, to begin things and not finish them?"

"A great pity," Dolores assented.

"But your singing was beautiful," he went on politely, as if to banish any ungrateful suggestion his words might have left. "The most beautiful I have ever heard. Do you like singing?"

"Yes, but to-day I was rather frightened at first."

"At singing in there?" with a little nod towards the closed door.

"Yes."

"Oh, but my mother is so good, she would not make you frightened. She thought it so kind of you to sing."

"It was very good of her to ask me, another time perhaps I should not be frightened."

"If you tell me when you are coming, I shall come too. It is getting dark," he said, "the sun has set, I must ring for lights."

Before they came, Miss Shore looked in to say Good-bye. "Because I am very busy, Dolores, with a rehearsal; but when you have finished castle-building, ring to be shown to my room,—you will never find the way alone,—and Thérèse will be ready to take you home. You sang beautifully," she added, and kissed the girl's cheek lightly, "you have a splendid future before you,—one of these days you will have the world at your feet."

To Dolores, left alone in the darkening room, the prophecy did not cause a thrill of expectant joy. It was the present, with its full measure of love for those who had been so good to her, that overflowed

her heart, to the exclusion of any looking into the future, for what it might hold in store.

From that time forward another leaf was turned in her daily life—seldom a day passed but what she was sent for to the Castle, on one excuse or another.

Now it was to spend the afternoon in Virginia Shore's red-walled room, amid the glitter of its various weapons; sometimes alone, listening to Virginia's talk or reciting one of the pieces that she still made her learn, but more often there were people coming and going—the other actors and actresses in the coming play, to talk over some difficult point, discuss some question of costume; and then the slight dark girl would pass almost unnoticed, so quiet and shy was she in manner. She was happy to sit with her sewing or a book in the background, and content herself with the knowledge that no one present could compare with Virginia.

Sometimes it would be the Princess who would ask for a song—or the little Prince who would persuade his mother to send for her.

“The English lady, mother, please send for her. I like her so very much, she is very clever, I think,” using that formal speech which sat so oddly on him, speech copied from the elders with whom he lived, “she can do so many things.”

And his will being law, Dolores would be sent for, and many happy hours were spent thus. Perhaps in a way she was lonely too, and the kindness

of this little playfellow, who made no secret of his admiration, was dear to her.

Everything had come to pass that Emilie had most feared, against which she had raised a protest, a protest indorsed by her father.

From the safe atmosphere of home, with no experience to guide her, Dolores had passed into the troubled atmosphere of the world—a microcosm—but still one in which all the world's sins and sorrows would be encountered, and talked over, and, barely comprehended now, would yet sow their seeds, one day to bear the accustomed crop—distrust and doubt—an evil crop whose sowing cannot be postponed too long.

But Emilie was not here to stand between the girl and the miniature world which had opened before her, and whose glories she was marvelling over; there was no one to warn or guide. It is a sad fact, that in a world governed on the strictest principles, there is never any one else who can assume entirely another's allotted task. With the best of wishes there is always some part of it, perhaps a small and seemingly unimportant part, which no one else can undertake.

M. Desprez was kindness itself. Dolores loved him better and better as the days passed: in her girlish enthusiasm she would not have desired any change in him, had such change been possible.

Flattered and pleased at the favours shown to this girl, of whom he was really fond, he would never

have stood in the way of her enjoying such change and amusement as were possible.

“It is all a help,” he would say and sigh, “to forgetting—if forgetfulness were possible—the sorrow and trouble he had known.”

And then one day it came to pass that there was a new, and yet very accustomed stranger amid Virginia’s friends.

Jerome Shore had obtained a fortnight’s leave, so as to attend the final rehearsals of the play, which were now taking place.

Dolores made no secret of the delight she felt in seeing him. He was her first, nay, her only friend ; with the others, she a little shadow, scarcely noticed, saving when in answer to Virginia’s call she hastened to her side to do whatever she needed. But with Captain Shore it was different : his eyes sought for her directly he entered the room ; he would question her about her life, her pleasures, and her music, and show such interest in all she had to tell, that it was little wonder that he was the chief factor in the happiness of these days that had dawned upon her. He often walked home with her now—Thérèse was busy, and—

“Just walk to the postern door,” Virginia would say, “it will only take five minutes, Jerome.”

And Jerome would rise at once ; he always did what Virginia asked him.

“Don’t lose sight of her till she is in her own house,” she would add, and kissing the girl, would

turn back to her tea-making or conversation, feeling she had done all that was necessary.

But it did not take only five minutes to reach the door, there was generally something to look at on the way. There were the swans, or the hothouses, or the gardens. When Dolores faltered out a hesitating word, she was reassured at once.

"No one ever comes into the garden, unless there is a party," he would answer. "We are quite safe, unless Virginia takes up her seat by the window,—and she would only thank me for showing you the lions." Or they would saunter very slowly under the linden-trees, which were just acquiring the first green flush of spring.

"What is the use of hurrying?" Captain Shore would ask. "I don't know what you may be returning to, but I know what I am trying to avoid."

"What?"

"The fifty-second rehearsal since I arrived."

And then they would both laugh, and Dolores would say demurely: "But it was worse for me when I used to rehearse, because I never improved—at least so Miss Shore said."

"She is a very discouraging teacher," her hearer answered. "She even tries her best to make light of my talents, but I am glad to say," with a laugh, "that I am far too satisfied with myself to be discouraged even by her criticisms."

One night after one of these walks, M. Desprez—just stepping out of his brougham—saw them as

they opened the door in the wall, and beckoning to Captain Shore, invited him to enter, in his usual friendly fashion, and Jerome willingly assented.

“Run up and take off your hat,” he said to Dolores, “and then come to the library; Captain Shore and I will smoke a cigarette in the meantime.”

The bright spring day was drawing to a close, the wood-fire was cheerful, as M. Desprez entered and drew up a chair for his visitor. There were tokens of Dolores’s presence—work, and a book, for the drawing-room was now seldom used, the man and the girl more often sat together: the man from that need for companionship, approving companionship, which was one of the strongest needs of his nature; the girl, because she was as yet too young to find much pleasure in solitude.

Presently coffee was brought, and later on Dolores entered, and took her place at the little table, and began pouring it out.

M. Desprez looked across and smiled;—he did not stop in his talk, but it pleased him to note the bright colour burning in her cheeks, which made her almost pretty—the sweet shy eyes, and soft little curls on her forehead. Jerome noted it all too, and after the cigarette was finished and the talk had grown less constant, he began to beg for a song.

Somehow no one ever long refused Jerome Shore anything, and M. Desprez was not one to need much persuading. He laid aside his pipe, and went to the piano.

"Come, Dolores, we must do what we can to amuse our guest," taking the girl's hand in his, as he passed the little table, and drawing her away by his side.

Captain Shore did not move his chair from where it was placed in front of the fire, did not attempt to watch the singer.

She sang some sweet, old-fashioned sacred music: her dramatic instincts as yet, at any rate, were so dormant that M. Desprez did not encourage anything except the pure severe music of the old masters, which seemed best expressed by the gravity and sweetness of her tones. When the notes died away, the listener was aware that his eyes were misty with tears. Perhaps M. Desprez recognised the appreciation in the silence that followed the few faltering words of thanks: he grasped the young man's hand warmly. To any demonstration of feeling he was always at once and keenly alive.

"It is a beautiful voice, is it not?" he said, following his visitor out to the door. "I am beginning to have my doubts about opera, but there are other roads to fame, though," with a sigh, "that is by far the best and surest."

"It is sacrilege to talk of fame, or opera, or anything so worldly, after what we have been listening to," Captain Shore answered, with half-repressed enthusiasm. "Good night, it is useless trying to thank you."

That night as he and his sister found themselves

for a short while in unaccustomed solitude, Virginia,—moving about the room, her mind still wandering to the suggestions of the evening, for the play was the all-engrossing topic of the hour,—was startled by a sound very like a sigh.

She paused and looked inquiringly round over her shoulder.

“I have a good mind,” Jerome said, impetuously, “to go out to Africa, or wherever Dorislaus is, and throw in my fate with his!”

“Jerome, you make me seriously uneasy. Don’t tell me,” clasping her hands, “that it is the same reason which is luring you towards Africa.”

At the expression in her eyes, he smiled, and shook his head.

“I breathe again! Really, you made me quite anxious. Why, I began to foresee the time when the regiment would have to be disbanded, if you were all going to fall into the same pit.”

But though he joined in her laugh, she was too shrewd not to suspect something lay hidden under his words; all her faculties were on the alert at once. The softest part of her heart was certainly in the possession of her brother. She knew so well, or fancied she knew, what would render him happy, that freedom from daily care was certainly a strong factor in any future happiness she designed for him. Perhaps she only judged from herself; it is so difficult to see others with different eyes from those with which we are accustomed to view ourselves.

“Love is a very troublesome visitor,” she said lightly, as she moved about, “at least, judging by what I see. People really inconvenience themselves very unnecessarily! Now if Prince Lescynski had not been so impatient——” She paused. Jerome had risen, and with a little yawn and a shake, as he stood on the hearth-rug, was evidently preparing his good-night.

“But I suppose,” he said carelessly, as she paused, “that notwithstanding all the excellent advice offered them, people will continue going down into the pit.”

“I suppose so,” she assented, “but unfortunately, as a rule, they don’t go alone; and from what I see, I fear that single selfishness is better than married poverty. It appears almost impossible for Love to survive Discomfort.”

CHAPTER XXII.

“Coup d’Aiguille, coup d’Epée—qu’importe, si on en meurt.”

ON the morning of the day which was to witness Miss Shore’s theatricals, one of those messages which had grown so frequent, summoned Dolores to the Palace. The little Prince wanted her,—it was his birthday, and the evening *fête* was nominally in his honour; but for his own especial amusement, he had begged that Dolores Traherne might be invited to spend a couple of hours with him.

Everybody was busy, occupied with the preparations for the evening; Dolores saw no one, as under the care of M. Desprez’s servant she went the accustomed way to the palace.

It was spring now, real, early spring weather. The air was sweet with lilacs and hawthorn, the tender early flush of green made beautiful the lindens in the garden. In her hand Dolores held a great bunch of sky-blue forget-me-nots she had herself gathered, edged with golden buttercups. With this she presented her little playfellow, who had come to meet

her, with that mixture of hearty childish love and old-fashioned dignity which sat on him so oddly.

"You are so welcome," he said. "My mother told me that perhaps you would be busy, and unable to come."

Dolores's cheeks flushed with pleasure, as he held her hand, and thanked her for the flowers, and yet she was conscious, amid all his attempts at courteousness, of the pretty childish eyes that kept glancing at the queer-shaped parcel she still held in her hands.

"Yes," she said, "this is my birthday present. Can you guess—no, I am sure you cannot—what it is?"

His eyes danced with laughter; he held his small fat hand to his mouth to try and hide the smiles that rippled there, and then all of a sudden, bursting forth into a laugh of unrestrained merriment—

"Oh, I *know*, I *know*!" he cried. "Undo it quick, quick," he pleaded.

Dolores took out the pins and undid the strings which had hidden it, and disclosed to view a very fat, comfortable-looking bullfinch, sitting rather disconsolately in a little cage.

"Oh, I knew it," the little Prince exclaimed, clapping his hands, "it is the tame bird you told me about?"

"Yes." Dolores was almost as pleased as the child at his enthusiasm. "It is that very same bird, but we must be quiet or we shall frighten it."

She placed it in the window, where the spring

sunshine streaming in should gladden its heart, and in a little while it began piping a sweet little song.

The child drew a small chair up to the window-seat, and in a hush of pleasure sat still, his chin in his hands, listening and watching.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," he presently said in a low voice, "it *is* a nice present! Could you, do you think, make it come out of its cage?"

Perhaps the same gentle gravity that endeared Dolores to those who knew her, had something to do with her chasing away the bird's fears.

It did not seem frightened when she opened the cage; and by-and-by, tempted by the sight of the seeds spread beyond, it stole out with little sharp careful looks around, and began hopping about beyond the prison bars.

The little Prince was delighted; he kissed Dolores, thanking her again and again, "and you will stay and take coffee here with me,—in honour of my birthday,—if you please, say 'Yes.'"

And when he showed her the small table with the two places, and learned from the attendant who appeared with the coffee that she was really expected, she gladly agreed.

That was an hour that Dolores was destined never to forget in all her after-life. Life held yet much in store for her; many chances and changes were yet to befall her, as they do to us all, challenge fate as little as we may; but never was, in the years to come, quite banished from her memory that

coffee-drinking with her little companion. The spring sunshine streaming in and lighting up the dark corners of the book-lined room, touching with gold the bright curls of her host, as he laughed and talked; the table, with the flowers she had brought placed in a glass in the centre, as he had insisted on; the little bird hopping and chirping on the window-sill. In the corner, the figure of the elderly woman silently knitting—his nurse now, as she had once, in old days, been his mother's maid.

Afterwards there was the cake to be cut, which Dolores must do, but when she had done so, two slices must be placed aside. "One for my mother," he explained, "because it is my birthday-cake, and one for Mimi, my nurse. She is old," he explained, as if in excuse for her own share being delayed, "and it is polite to help old people first."

There was a faint interrogation in the words, which was answered by Dolores's ready acquiescence as she cut the slices required.

As a rule, children prefer seriousness; perhaps they understand it better. There is always a little fear of a laugh, of which, perhaps, their minds do not grasp the point. Many a time little Oscar, young as he was, had winced at some passing remark of Virginia Shore's, of which the meaning was to him vague and undefined.

It was six o'clock. Dolores was considering the advisability of departure—had approached the old nurse with some such question—when the curtain

that hung across the door was lifted, and the Princess stood on the threshold.

Dolores, startled and nervous, dropped a frightened curtsey, her first thought being that she had outstayed her invitation, for that the Princess should enter like this was unprecedented. On the occasions on which she had sung to her, she had always been taken into the other room, and she felt herself paling and blushing with fear that she had been indiscreet.

But in a moment the soft, languid voice of the Princess banished any such fear.

"I was afraid you might have gone, and I want you to sing something to me." But at the evident nervousness of the girl—"You will be so kind, I know," she added, with that sweetness of expression which could make her so charming on occasions. "Come, take off your hat again; we are not an alarming audience, only Oscar and I."

The old nurse took off her hat, and Dolores, faltering a word of acquiescence, turned to follow the two into the further room, the little boy the while explaining the beauties and talents of his new treasure.

"It is so kind, is it not, of the English lady?"

"Yes, Oscar, it is indeed kind. But we must call her by her name."

Never had Dolores known this stately woman so gentle and kind. She seemed bent on setting her at her ease. It almost seemed as if the absence of Miss

Shore's clear eyes and voice lent a gentler tone to the atmosphere.

The Princess was dressed as on that first occasion when Dolores had sung to her, in the soft white-furred robe, with the sapphire clasps, and even to Dolores's childish eyes,—though no whys nor wherefores presented themselves,—there was a consciousness of the restless discontent in the blue eyes, which now and then almost resembled pain.

To-night she did not try to dissemble,—alone with two children, what was the good! She had somehow gained this hour of freedom, and though solitude would have been hateful to her, the presence of these two made the difference, without the disadvantages of older, more observant society.

"You shall not sing yet," she said, seating herself in a low dark-blue velvet chair by the fire. "Bring up another chair, Oscar, and then Miss Traherne can sit down."

"The lady's name is Dolly," little Oscar observed.

"Well, I think we must call her by it."

"Yes, dear mother."

Little Oscar lifted his mother's slender white hand with its sapphire rings, and kissed it.

"That is much easier—I cannot remember the other name, and every one calls her Dolly."

It was impossible to continue frightened. The slowly increasing dusk was a help, and the chatter of the child made conversation easier. He talked of the bird.

"Its name is Max, and when it is not frightened, you will see how clever it is. It will eat sugar out of your hand."

And the Princess also was seen at her best, with this little beloved son. It brought into evidence all that was most tender and womanly in her.

Even ambition stooped to own a master in the love she bore her son, though there were some who called it not love but pride, though with those who knew her best no such doubt found a place.

"Now, Oscar, open the piano," she said at length, "Dolores must sing us a song."

"Yes, mother." He rose, but on the way his quick eyes discovered a box of photographs. "Oh, mother, please let us first look at Miss Shore's pictures again, she has left them here."

"Well, so let it be. Bring a small table for them."

The box contained a dozen copies or more of celebrated pictures, and they had interested the child in some cursory glimpse he had had of them. His eyes were shining with pleasure as he drew near with it in his hand, and began taking them out one by one. "The Floating Martyr," several of Millais, and other modern painters,—to Dolores almost all unknown,—her pleasure was almost as great as that of her childish companion. The "Huguenot" was an old friend, and she looked at it with greater interest in proportion to its association. Over the Princess,—leaning back in her chair, alternately watching

the fire, or turning to answer some question of her little son's,—had stolen a shadow of the peace that was so unhabitual to her.

“There are no more,” Oscar said at length, in a tone of disappointment, “no more pictures, only people,” emptying the box haphazard on to the table. Uppermost, lying a little apart from the others, was a likeness with Rembrandt effect, of a young man with smooth head and strongly marked features, and eyes, which even in the photograph met the observer with a shadow of sadness, a face that insisted on being remarked, and once seen, could not hope to escape remembrance.

“Why, that is——” Dolores began, stretching out her slight girlish fingers towards it,—and there stopped. “Who was it? Where had she seen it?” And back to her memory rushed, now that it was too late for her to be silent, that afternoon at Ehrenberg,—those dreary minutes spent alone in the cold chapel, with its mementoes of the dead and living, the strange epitaph on the old Crusader’s tomb, and the young man who had looked at her and her companion with the same unhappy eyes that now met her own. The mystery of it all, which had puzzled her for the moment, had gradually faded. Jerome Shore’s parting words of trust were the part of the afternoon that had taken the deepest hold of her, and it was the memory of those words of trust that made her falter now, and turn red, and sink into uneasy silence.

The Princess, hearing the words, roused by the silence, turned and looked to meet the same face.

She sat up, glancing first with strange shrinking at the dark noticeable head, and then with something approaching curiosity at Dolores's disturbed countenance. "Where did you see the original?" she inquired carelessly, and yet she did not turn her eyes away.

To Dolores the moment was agony. She knew from the little even she had learnt, that the question required an answer, but what could she say? What that would not be a refutation of the trust that had been reposed in her? There had been no limits set to her silence;—he, who could alone set her free to speak, was not here to help her, and to her unsophisticated ignorant youth, no prevarication presented itself.

Her cheeks burnt so that she felt the tears rising, her voice faltered, and was so low, that it failed to reach the ears of the lady whose eyes were still watching every shade of colour, noting her evident trouble.

"Where?" she repeated, not catching the unsteady whisper.

"She says she must not say," little Oscar translated, with a child's ready unquestioning acceptance of the inevitable. "Shall I put the pictures back now, mother, and then ask Dolly to sing?"

"Never mind putting the pictures back just yet, we will have the song first."

She did not touch them, did not move the photograph from where it rested, but under the shelter of her slender hand, her eyes were turned towards the resolute features and dark eyes, which she could only recall passionate and despairing, while Dolores, glad to escape further questions, sat down at the piano, and sang the beautiful serious music, which suited her voice and youth, and which seemed to the Princess's world-wearied soul to bring her to the opening gates of heaven.

The twilight deepened while the girlish voice sang on pure and clear, and the Princess, wrapped in her own dreams, remained scarcely conscious of the flight of time, the little son on his accustomed low chair by her side. Music touched him also, and his wild spirits and love of laughter and mirth always sank into quietude under its charm.

It was a long time before she roused herself to say, "Oscar, I fear we are tiring your friend. We must say good-bye now, and ask her to come another day."

She thanked the girl herself, but she was aware of the uneasy flush that coloured her cheeks, as her eyes again fell again on the picture; but she respected her silence, did not, as Virginia Shore would have been tempted to do, say a word that, in adding to it, might perhaps in addition have thrown a light on its cause.

That evening, whilst the theatricals were in mid

career, and the attention of all those present was given to Miss Shore and her brother in the principal scene of the play—the fencing-match—the Princess, turning her head, said slowly, not wholly removing her eyes from the stage, “Excellency, where did the little English girl meet Prince Lescynski?”

Even his Excellency, accustomed as he was to the unaccustomed, was startled. For a second his straying thoughts could not be forced into the required groove.

“What English girl, Princess?” was all he could say in return.

She did not raise her voice, or even turn her gaze from the quick flashes of Virginia’s sword, as, “M. Desprez’s little pupil,” she explained. “She was singing to me to-day, and saw a photograph amongst some Miss Shore had left in my room. She recognised it, that was evident, but she would say nothing. She was too unsophisticated to withdraw from the situation when I questioned her.” There was a smile now in the eyes that at last met those of his Excellency. “I did not press her, as she was on the verge of tears. I thought you might know,” opening her fan slowly, and looking away.

“I can easily find out,” he answered.

There was no reply, but he guessed his words were heard, though her attention was once again given to the stage.

After the supper, held later on, at which all the

actors were present, as well as several of those who had been spectators, in the talk and excitement that prevailed, his Excellency, finding himself standing by Miss Shore, after a few compliments, suddenly changing from the light tones in which he had been addressing her, said, lifting his keen eyes: "When did your little English friend make Prince Lesceynski's acquaintance, and what is the mystery about it?"

If he had been surprised a couple of hours ago, there was no doubt about his companion's surprise now, but she recovered herself in a minute, or at least her power of speech.

"Do you mean little Dolores? Well, Excellency, I can only say you know more than I do, for I never heard the fact until this moment."

"Nevertheless," he persisted, "she knew his photograph,—by the by, one of *your* treasures,"—he added, "when she saw it this afternoon."

"That is not improbable. She may have seen him anywhere! Why, M. Desprez may have pointed him out. You forget, Excellency,"—a little maliciously—"that he was one of the Objects of Interest in this dull little place."

"I do not forget," he returned, imperturbably.

"No, Excellency, I am sure you don't."

"But having seen him thus would not have created the mystery, which was that she refused to say where she had seen him, was ready to cry when asked, and"—with a little bow—"not having had

the excellent training of Miss Shore, for instance,—could only show symptoms of tears, and stammer she must not say.”

Even as he spoke, Virginia's quick brain, reviewing the past for a solution of what appeared inexplicable, recalled the afternoon at Ehrenberg—Jerome's ascent of the tower, little Dolores—his companion; their long absence, and the subsequent conclusions she had drawn. Now the rest of the picture was sketched in, and she understood it all. His Excellency's half words were sufficient to bring the scene vividly before her, with a little malicious satisfaction that was a source of amusement. The Princess seeking for the information from unsophisticated Dolores that she would not ask from others, and then driven through her non-success to appeal after all to his Excellency to satisfy her curiosity. Dolores won over to silence by Jerome's fear of her, Virginia's, sharp eyes and tongue; a silence from which in his carelessness he had never set her free. There were few details even wanting in the rapid sketches that one by one appeared before her. She had been piqued at what had been withheld from her. There was a certain amount of satisfaction now in the recognition of the failure of the plot, in which she had had no part.

“It is mostly guess-work, Excellency, but I think I have the key to your riddle,” and she told him what she knew.

Later on, finding herself by her brother: “My

dear Jerome," she said, "do take a word of advice. Never tell people, especially young people, to keep your secrets. Keep them yourself, or let them take their chance."

"Which of my secrets has been unearthed now?"

"A secret that you kept from me, and told to Dolly, and the result has been," she shrugged her shoulders, "Woe and Desolation!"

"What do you mean?"

Hitherto his attention had been barely arrested, now he was undoubtedly anxious.

"Oh, it is too late for it to do any harm now, though Dolores did not know that; and so, when questioned as to when and where she had seen Prince Lescynski," with a smile, and lowering of her voice, "a knowledge she had betrayed apparently, she could only say she must not tell. And when pressed, showed symptoms of bursting into tears."

"But who asked her? Who?" as she hesitated.

"My dear, be discreet, and answer your own question. Our hostess, of course. But I am afraid," smiling again, "Dolores, bound over to secrecy, did not afford her much information. It is wrong to laugh, I know, but it seems to me too funny."

She moved away, and for a few minutes Jerome Shore remained just where he had stood whilst listening to her words. He did not laugh, was not even smiling, there was nothing funny to him in the story. The little scene did not present itself to him

as it had done to Virginia, piquant, vivid, something to smile at—and then forget or remember, as was best. He could think of nothing but his own words, bidding her not betray the secret that so unintentionally she had become possessed of, and of her ready, serious promise which he had known she would keep. There was remorse in the memory, remorse at his forgetfulness, as his sister's words grew more clear, and he realised all they meant. Afterwards it was only of Dolly's soft eyes, wet with tears, as she strove to do as he had bidden her, that he could think.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“One instant we stood in that happy garden, guardianless.”

THE morning that followed the birthday of the little Prince—a day that had been of moment to many—Dolores awoke to unaccustomed consciousness of trouble. The previous evening she had been too tired and too much excited to fully appreciate the unenviable quarter of an hour she had spent after recognising the picture of the sad-eyed stranger; but now she was weighed down with the remembrance of her awkwardness and childishness.

Tears of mortification again came into her eyes at the thought of those other tears which had so nearly fallen—of her hesitating replies, and of all she had done to attract, instead of avert attention. She longed, yet feared to meet Captain Shore: it would be something, some ease to her conscience, to tell him how dismally she had failed to keep the secret which he—and here lay the sting—so unwillingly had confided to her.

But she would not see him; he was not staying

for long, she knew, and he would hear of that start of recognition at the sight of the picture, that foolish exclamation; and he would perhaps never care that she had kept silence afterwards—at what cost, only she herself knew.

But all the time she was saying “No,” and prophesying despair, a voice which is always at youth’s elbow was whispering, that perhaps, after all, she might be sent for this very day. It was some time now since Miss Shore had been able to have her,—why not to-day? The great business of the play was over,—and if so, there was a chance—nay, the strongest chance—that he might still be there. And then——

And then, as there was no watchful Emilie to guard against idleness, no one to care how the spring day was spent, with its alternations of black thundery clouds and brilliant sunshine, she placed herself at the window, so that, should there be any messenger with a note, she might know at once, and be spared the anxiety of ignorance.

And at last—patience is sometimes unexpectedly rewarded—just as in her wildly unreal hope she had imagined, there was a click of the little gate, and in the narrow garden-path appeared Thérèse, blooming and pretty, a white envelope in her hand.

“Dolores.” She had hurried across the room to know her fate as quickly as might be, and M. Desprez entering, met her on the threshold. “Dolores, I forgot to tell you before, but I promised

Baroness Waldberg that you should go this afternoon, and sing to her. She is old and blind, but her opinion is invaluable; it will influence many——”

He stopped. A servant entering with a note broke the thread of his explanations.

Dolores's slight fingers seized and opened it. There was no mistaking Miss Shore's clear writing, M. Desprez hesitated, waiting to be told the contents.

“It is from Miss Shore,” she explained, breathlessly, flushing with pleasure; “she wants me to go and have tea with her.”

It was evident M. Desprez's words were forgotten in the immediate excitement.

“To-day?” he asked. “What a pity!”

But it was only the natural, careless expression at an inconvenient conjunction of circumstances. His mind was still far more with his previous words. “After all,” he added, kindly, “it does not very much matter. You can go to Miss Shore's any day. Write an answer,” he went on, “and explain to her how the matter stands; she will recognise the importance of such an engagement. You can have the brougham; I am obliged to be in town. Why, Dolores,” looking back as he was leaving the room, and noting the cloud on the girl's face, “you surely are not frightened of an old blind lady, after singing to the Princess!” And satisfied with her shake of the head, he hurried away.

A shake of the head, because the lump in her

throat forbade words, and in addition, what would have been the use of words!

The nature of the engagement M. Desprez had made for her forbade any thought of escaping it; and it may be doubted, if in any case Dolores would have hazarded a remonstrance.

At Beverley Rectory there had never been any question on the subject of what was ordained. The "Grown-ups" made the laws, the young ones obeyed them, and such early training often bears fruit for a lifetime.

So, though there were tears in her eyes, there was no rebellion in her heart, as Dolores sat down and penned her answer,—a brief little review of the circumstances which prevented her accepting Miss Shore's kind invitation.

"It is very important, M. Desprez thinks, that I should go to the Baroness. He cannot take me himself; he is sending me in the brougham. As it is a very long drive, I shall not be back till it is too late to go to you."

At the very end there was one little line less carefully written than the preceding, as if it had been an after-thought out of the fulness of her heart.

"Dear Miss Shore, I am so very, very disappointed." And then the little accustomed signature, "Dolly."

Virginia was disappointed also when she had opened the letter and made herself acquainted with the contents.

There had been a pleasurable anticipation as she wrote her invitation. The little drama, of which she had had unsatisfactory glimpses, should be re-enacted for her benefit. Alone with Dolores, and holding the clue in her hand, she had not had much doubt of arriving at all she wished to know. That little scene, briefly outlined by his Excellency's words, should be filled in; she would realise it ever so much better as Dolores would tell it, with her crude childish comments, informing her hearer of so much that it would amuse her to know.

She flung the letter down with an impatient exclamation.

"What is it?" Jerome asked.

He was returning to his regiment next day, and in the meantime was dawdling about his sister's room, now and then criticising some point in the previous night's performance, and then falling into unaccustomed silence, his thoughts wandering to the story he had been told of Dolores.

"You can read it." She said nothing else, and Jerome took up the note. The unformed childish writing at once told him from whom it came. Something in it touched him, possibly he was in the mood to be touched by anything that had reference to Dolores Traherne.

In a moment, even whilst reading it, he seemed to see clearly a fact that had hitherto escaped him—that he must see her, and gain forgiveness for the

carelessness that had caused her so much trouble. But this result of his thoughts he did not confide to his sister.

After all, though there was that sense of disappointment in the background to prevent its being altogether delightful, it was impossible not to enjoy the drive to Waldberg.

The way led through lovely country roads, green with the first greenness of spring, undimmed as yet with summer dust;—overhead were the golden blossoms of the laburnums, which bordered the road. The sun shone brilliantly down, though there were threatening thunder-clouds about, and now and then a quick splash of rain, which passed, leaving sparkling drops on every gold-laden branch.

Then such a garden, of which Dolores caught glimpses through the trees of the avenue—a garden at present rich with the colours of flowering bushes. Splendid acacias, whose white blossoms scented the air, masses of scarlet rhododendrons, a thorn, which was a flush of pink, against the grey stone of the house; then before she had time to feel shy or frightened, an elderly lady, with a kind gentle face, was bidding her welcome, and thanking her for coming.

“To cheer us, my sister and I. The Baroness Waldberg is my sister—and music is such a treat to her. She is blind, you know, and we are both old, so we are very glad when young people come and see us.”

And with kindly words she was taken into a long low room, which opened through many windows on to the bright garden, whose one occupant, the blind Baroness Waldborg, was awaiting her.

She talked less than her sister, but she set the girl at ease directly, asking questions about her lessons, and the training she was having, and what M. Desprez was doing.

"She was a splendid singer herself once," the sister explained to Dolores. "Ah! she had her triumphs: she knows all about it, and the young voices they interest her;—she believes in M. Desprez."

"He is a good teacher," the Baroness observed. "His style is faultless. It is surprising too," she added, with a faint shrug.

"Ah no, sister, not surprising. He knows so well what is good."

"True." The Baroness spoke thoughtfully. "It is only that, except for training, he thinks it is scarcely worth while."

She did not explain herself, and the younger sister was busy now taking off Dolores's cloak and hat, before seating herself at the piano.

"I do not play very well," she said apologetically, "but just enough," striking a chord, and smiling at the girl, and Dolores took her place by her side.

There was something in the atmosphere of the room, its serenity and gravity, and its occupants—the kind encouraging gentleness of the one woman,

the attentive appreciative look on the other's face—which helped Dolores to sing her very best. There was no thought in her heart of the weight that might attach to this lady's judgment,—all personal thoughts were swallowed up in some vague memory of her own disappointment, which was swept away in the sight of this affliction, which sat at the window on this lovely day, and looked over the glories of colour without, with unseeing, ungladdened eyes.

The sober solemn music was a fit solace for such deprivation, or so Dolores understood it, and the high clear notes, when they died away, left a message of pity and love behind.

In the silence that followed, they did not praise or comment or commend. Baroness Isabel, so was the sister called, turned and clasped the girl's hand, and drawing her down kissed her cheek—there were tears in her soft kind eyes.

And the other, the silent figure in the window, she did not turn her darkened eyes, but she smiled, such a sweet smile—you saw the woman who had once had the world at her feet—and begged for something else.

“But while she rests, Isabel,—for we must not tire her,—describe her to me. Tell me just what she is like.”

Isabel led her back to the window.

“Sit down here, my dear,” she said gently, pointing to an old-fashioned high-backed chair, “while I tell her what I can. You will not mind, I am sure,” and

Dolores shook her head. "Oh no, I was sure you would not, because I am her eyes."

In simple words she drew the portrait of the slim girl, still so little more than a child, with her straight eyebrows and grave eyes, and small head with its crown of thick smooth plaits.

The elder lady nodded and smiled a little as the picture drew itself out before her, and when her sister had finished, she took the girl's hand in hers.

"A woman with a voice like yours," she said gently, "must be good and pure and simple to be worthy of it. I heard it all in the voice; my sister reads it in your face. The good God gave you it all, now it depends on you to keep it."

Dolores flushed a little under the earnestness of the words, the gaze of the blind eyes, but it was only a momentary nervousness which could find no appropriate words for a reply; she was not really as shy as she often felt even yet with Virginia Shore, but she was glad when it was proposed she should sing something else.

"But we must not tire her, Isabel. It is very bad for the voice to be tired."

"Yes," Isabel assented. "After this I will put on my bonnet, and take her for a turn through the garden. That will refresh her."

And after the song was over, Dolores's protestations were of no avail.

That was quite enough for the present. Perhaps, before she went, one more, and another day, yes.

M. Desprez must be prevailed on to let her come again.

And whilst the talk was still going on, the door was opened, the solemn butler announced a name which fell unheeded on the ears of those who should have heard it,—only, whilst Baroness Isabel was striving to adjust her glasses in order to discover who was the new-comer, had Dolores time to recognise the well-known figure of Jerome Shore. His grey eyes rested on hers for a moment in glad recognition, and then he was kissing the hand of Baroness Waldberg, and replying to her words of welcome.

To Dolores, the revulsion of feeling was so intense that it rendered her dumb. Beyond that first smile of welcome when he took her hand, she could say and do nothing.

She had felt so certain of the vanity of hope when this afternoon visit had prevented her accepting Virginia's invitation, that the first keen pang of disappointment was almost lost in the distance; and in the kindness she had received, and the pleasure she felt she had given, the disappointment itself had even grown less keen. But now it was all altered again, and she could only marvel at the wondrous good fortune that had befallen her. No suspicion of Jerome's having lent a helping hand to Fate ever occurred to her, and whilst he was talking to the ladies, telling them of the play of the previous night, and of his own plans and move-

ments, she was striving to think in what words she should introduce the subject so heavily weighing on her, should the opportunity arise. And the opportunity was to be granted.

The talk was no longer in German, but in English, so as to include the other visitor.

She was being spoken of, and Captain Shore was explaining that no introduction was necessary, how she was a friend of his sister's, and that they had often met there, also that he had had the privilege one fortunate evening of hearing her sing.

Then there was more talk, and somehow finally it was arranged that Captain Shore should take Dolores out and show her the garden.

"And the waterfall," Baroness Isabel added; "she will find that so charming, and I am afraid I never should have been able to take her there, it is so steep. The walk will be pleasant, and by-and-by you will come back, and have some cake and wine before returning home."

A great deal of talk was necessary before all this was arranged, but at length Dolores, with her heart beating very fast, found herself walking away with Captain Shore towards the waterfall, and the two old ladies were left congratulating themselves on the cleverness of their arrangements.

"They will enjoy it much more," Baroness Isabel said, "than if I had gone too, for I walk very slowly; and though the little girl is rather quiet and shy, Captain Shore is always so pleasant and lively, he will

find plenty to say, and I daresay she will be less shy when they are alone."

"And they are young,"—and the elder woman sighed,—“ah! never fear, they will find plenty to say."

At first it did not seem as if her words would be verified. The talking all fell to Captain Shore. His companion listened and assented, and smiled a little now and then; but she was not at her ease, and Jerome was well aware it was so, perhaps had his suspicions as to the reason. But he did not let his suspicions escape him as he led her across the lawns under the scented linden boughs, past the glories of the blossoming hawthorn to a narrow path with trees overhead, under whose spring foliage ferns and forget-me-nots grew thickly. It was a narrow path, becoming rapidly narrower and steeper; and Jerome Shore, walking somewhat quickly, became aware that his companion's steps had flagged, that her breath was coming in little pants. He stopped short with an apologetic word.

"I am walking as if for a race," he said, "but I think I have a reason. I believe if we could see the sky we should find a storm was imminent, and it would be a pity, would it not, not to see the water-fall after all?"

Even as he spoke, there was the patter of rain on the leaves above them.

"Oh, I do not mind the rain," Dolores said earnestly, "please do not turn back."

“But you must not get wet. Now, if we can find our way to the top there is a cave, very damp and uncomfortable, if I remember right, but still we can take shelter there till the rain is over. Are you rested?” and at her nod they went on again.

Another five minutes and they were standing in a pretty spot, where the waters of a brook, splashing from stone to stone, created a miniature waterfall, but it was less at this object of interest Captain Shore looked, than at the dark clouds that had gathered around—at the rain which was growing heavier.

“We shall have a storm, I am afraid; but never mind, here is the cave, we will wait in it till it is over, I daresay it will not last.”

To Dolores the fact of a storm was very unimportant—here was her opportunity, which she must not neglect; but the words were somehow difficult to find.

Just within the entrance of the cave, which was certainly neither very dry nor very cheerful under present circumstances, there was a large stone, on which she seated herself, according to Captain Shore’s directions.

“Now you must look out and admire the view,” he said, “so as to be able to prove to the Baroness that I really brought you here. I am sure,” with a smile towards the rain, which was now falling in torrents, “you could not wish for more water—it makes the fall twice its ordinary size.”

"Captain Shore." It was not a smiling reply to his words that met his ear, but a hesitating repetition of his name, which somehow seemed to demand his attention.

"Yes." He was standing a little behind her, leaning against the arched entrance of the cave. At the sound he bent his head, as if afraid of missing her words.

She did not turn her head, but spoke quickly, with a little shy catch in her voice, looking straight before her all the time.

"Captain Shore, I wanted to see you, to tell you——" Her voice failed her, she turned and looked helplessly at him with distressed eyes. "It was something very foolish I did, but I did not mean——"

"I think I know what you want to tell me," he said, kindly. "Let me say something first. I also wanted to see you to tell you how ashamed I felt when I heard that my carelessness had caused you so much trouble. The time had gone past when it was necessary to keep the secret which we shared—a foolish secret, which I never saw any reason for keeping; but it was not mine, so I had no choice. I quite forgot to set you free when I was freed myself, so you see it is no wonder that I felt ashamed."

She had never known him so earnest and quiet before, although he always did set her doubts at rest and banish her shyness, still this seemed something

more. He was gravely sorry, of that there was no doubt.

"I am so glad," she said, quietly, "that you know. I was so afraid I might have done wrong, because you *did* trust me, did you not? You knew I meant to keep it, only," with a sudden painful flush, "I was so stupid, I did not know what to say."

"I think you were very brave."

She looked up quickly, with a little uncertain smile, then turned her eyes away.

"He will never know how nearly I cried," was the thought that flashed through her mind. "I am glad. I would rather he did not know *how* silly I was."

It was the thought of those tears that was in his mind also: perhaps he guessed that it was for some such reason she did not meet his eyes now. And, as she did not speak—

"You must forgive me," he said, gently. "It was for this I hurried you up here, and brought you to this horrid damp cave—not merely to admire the view in the laudable way you are doing. Look up at me," as even at the slight shadow of amusement in his voice, she did not look round. "Why, Dolly," a sudden change in his tones, "you are not crying?"

"No," she said sturdily, though at the same time one hand surreptitiously was lifted to her eyes. "No; only"—she looked round now, and there was a suspicious moisture about her lashes—"only you trusted me, and I do not want you to think that"—

hesitating—"it was a *pity* you had. Perhaps you do not know,"—she began.

For half a moment he paused, whilst his eyes, now quite grave, looked down into the serious upturned face, then—"I was told all about it," he answered, gravely, "and I think it was very courageous of you to say you could not reply. It was to tell you how sorry I am, that you should have had need of such courage, that I wanted to see you to-day."

"I ought not to have said it, I know," she faltered. There was a faint interrogation in the words, and her eyes wandered from his. "Is — any one — angry?"

"No—no one is angry," he answered, quietly.

She breathed a quick sigh that sounded like relief. "I am so glad you came; I wanted to ask you, because I knew you would tell me, and I was very unhappy last night."

"But now you will not be unhappy any more."

"No. How very, very fortunate it was you came here to-day—at least I think so."

"So do I." He smiled, and was about to add something else, but, after all, much better to leave it as it was. Let her go on thinking that kindly Fate had interfered. It would only render her ill at ease if she guessed that he had tampered with luck, whereas now, she was merely calmly gratefully happy.

He moved closer to the entrance, looking out at the dark clouds around, the heavy rain splashing down.

“I will tell you this,” he said, opening his watch, “unless this storm is soon over, I shall be deprived of my share of the cake and wine ; for I shall simply have to run to catch my train.”

“Why, what is the time ?” Dolores questioned, rising as she spoke, so as also to gain a better view of the inclement sky.

“Five,” as he held up his watch.

“Oh, we must go. I do not mind the rain. We must run.”

“Ah, but that beautiful white dress would mind it, if you don’t. No ; you must wait here, and I will risk catching a violent cold, and will run to the house, and send back an umbrella and a cloak. At any rate, I can gratify the Baroness by saying the waterfall has done its best. It is difficult to see which is waterfall at present, and which is rain, is it not ?”

He laughed, and Dolores smiled demurely. She was a child, just a child, as he caught the passing smile, not a shadow even of coquetry about her ; only that simple pleasure in his presence, which could scarcely fail to be more or less of a pleasure to him in return. But whilst he talked and postponed his departure, telling her first one little thing and then another that occurred to him—they were both standing, she with her back to the stream, which was now a dashing, foaming torrent—of a sudden there was a brilliant, vivid flash of lightning, and almost simultaneously a loud peal of thunder.

Startled by the unexpected sound, scared beyond measure before it had died away, Dolores was standing close beside him, her hand clasping his, begging of him not to go.

"Don't leave me here alone." The words had escaped her before she had time to realise them. "There is going to be a storm. Oh, please, don't go. I should be so frightened here alone."

He did not smile at her frightened words, or even temper his kindness with a mocking reply. To Jerome Shore, there was no amusement ever to be derived from the sight of suffering, however trivial it might appear to him. He was no longer a spectator, but a sufferer too.

"No, no," he said, quietly, "I shall not go while the storm lasts." He did not let go of the slight hand that had clasped his own; still holding it, he drew her further away from the entrance of the cave.

Another vivid flash. He felt her hand tremble, and turned to her encouragingly. "It will not last long, of that I am sure. I believe that last clap was farther away; let us hope so."

"Oh, I am not frightened if you stay," she repeated; "only I should not like to be left alone here. But your train?" she added, a moment later.

"That does not matter. There is another one later; I will go by it instead."

"Thank you—I never knew any one as kind as you are!"

Ah, Dolores! Sometimes the reward seems over

easily gained. Even Jem Traherne's shadow had ceased now to darken her path!

And, then, who can wonder——! Youth has its own reading of common things. The slight, confiding touch of the girlish hand, the trust in the sweet eyes, the whitening of the cheeks, from which the colour had faded in that sudden terror, all seemed so many revelations of an old-world miracle. To Jerome Shore, the revelation was a torch thrust flaming into the dark corners of his heart. Its beats grew so sudden and loud, that he feared they would betray him; in a moment it was as if he had walked the world till now, seeking this beautiful tender love which had blossomed in a moment of time, and that he had been so nearly passing ignorantly by.

“Dolly.” Very gently he laid his other hand over the one he still held, drawing her a little nearer as he spoke.

Startled at the word, the action, she strove to free herself, her eyes growing frightened, but before she had time to realise anything—

“Dolly,” he repeated, “do not try to leave me. You are happy with me, are you not? You say yourself I am kind to you, let me take care of you for ever.”

“What do you mean?” she faltered.

“I mean,” he said, impetuously, “that I love you too much to live without you. And you, Dolly, you love me; you must, you shall,” with quick decision, “you will be my wife.”

"Your wife?" she repeated the word wonderingly, as if she scarcely realised its meaning, and yet as she spoke there was almost an alteration in the expression of the tender upraised eyes, life is so swift to adapt itself to fresh combinations. Some shadow of his feeling fell across her, there were no doubts or fears to be combated now. It was a new road, along which beckoning hands were signalling to her, but the light which touched it was so strong and clear, that she was not afraid to venture.

The gods, far off and unapproachable, may stand on Olympus, and we may be content to offer our tribute of worship; but when they elected to come down and join the toiler below, we do not read that the mortal feared the god's approach. Love smoothed the path between the two.

As far off as any dweller on Olympus, Jerome Shore and his sister had always seemed in Dolores's eyes,—now that he stood thus, levelling the spaces that lay between them, she realised how much of warm human love had mingled with her worship.

When he spoke thus, she, like him, forgot the past, and the difficulties of the future; forgot everything but the present glorious never-to-be-forgotten hour, when he told his love-story to the accompaniment of the thunder-peals, now growing more and more distant, and which she no longer heeded, the splashing of rain, and the moan of the wind through the trees.

For the time being there was no thought of the

future, perhaps had she had time to think she would have declared there could be no future to such a dream; but seated on the great stone, at the cave's entrance, with Jerome Shore kneeling beside her, holding her slender ungloved hands, the golden present sufficed—at any price, so she would have then said, this hour was well bought.

And Captain Shore did not say much. In a way he felt as if he had profited by her momentary terror, and had surprised from her a secret, when she was almost incapable of withholding it, and, perhaps, though the hour was also golden to him, a sterner vision of the future fell necessarily to his lot. But if it came he put it aside. After all, there was no one entitled to call his actions in question. It was for him to decide, and if the decision called for sacrifices, he it was who would be called upon to make them.

When Dolores faltered out words of which his sister's name alone arrested his attention, he spoke at once quietly and reassuringly.

“I will tell her, and will consult with her, about what is best to be done, and then I will come and tell you all she says. She is very clever,” he said, half-laughingly, “she always knows the easiest way.”

“Yes, she is very clever,” Dolores assented, but *she* spoke doubtfully. “And I need not speak to any one,” she faltered timidly, raising her childish eyes with a new anxious expression to his own.

The rain had ceased, the sun was shining, the

birds singing, they were standing now in the narrow wet path, the heavy drops falling from the trees overhead;—another few steps would bring the house in sight, but here they were quite alone. Something in the expression troubled him, he stooped his head and kissed her.

“Let nothing trouble you,” he said, gently, “I will arrange everything,—I will tell my sister, and you must not be afraid,” as her hand clasped his more tightly, “I will think what is best to be done, and then I will come over and see you, and talk to M. Desprez.”

“But you are going away?”

“Not till to-morrow. I will see you again to-night. Now,” taking out his watch, “I must say good-bye, and be off to the station. It is a pity not to drive home with you, but better not. It would shock these ladies dreadfully, I am sure.”

Once more in the house, there were the condolences of the ladies to be met and answered. If Dolores was silent, they did not notice it. Captain Shore did all the talking that was necessary. His praises of the scenery were sufficient to delight them.

“It was a lovely walk,” he said,—“of course wet, but neither Miss Traherne nor I minded it, at least not until the thunder, and then we were very frightened, and took shelter in the cave.”

“Oh, what a good thing you were there, Captain Shore!” Baroness Isabel exclaimed, “though of course

I should not have sent Miss Traherne by herself, still, if I had been with her, it would have been just as bad, for a thunderstorm terrifies me. I should not have known what to do, it would have been quite as bad as if she had been alone."

"Whereas with me she felt quite safe, did you not?" He turned round and looked at her, a smile in his grey eyes.

"And we admired the waterfall greatly," he added, when he saw the colour fly up into her cheeks. "Miss Traherne says it is the most beautiful waterfall she has ever seen."

He smiled again at his words, to which Dolores gave a trembling assent, and very shortly after he left, with one kindly backward glance, which seemed to give her strength and comfort.

There was no reality about the situation; during the long drive home she sat watching the drooping laburnums and white blossoming hedges, with eyes that saw little of the bright spring evening, from which the storm had vanished, leaving not a cloud in the clear sky; all the time she was listening to his voice that had told the love-story, recalling the words, smiling in tender memory over each sentence, seeing the grey eyes that had always been kind and affectionate, and which to-day had sought hers with a stronger tenderer meaning. Time stood still whilst she lived again and again those happy moments in face of the foaming stream. Nothing of all around was really present to her senses,—and yet

when, in the after-years, some tender, happy memory laid its spell upon her heart, calling up these never-to-be-forgotten hours, there would come before her at once, at this touch of Memory's light hand, a reach of hedges, whitened with hawthorn, the scent of hawthorn bloom in the air, and overhead the golden blossoms, on which raindrops still glittered and sparkled in the sunlight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“It behoves each to see, when he sacrifices prudence, to what god he devotes it.”

To Jerome Shore the homeward journey did not grant the same calm sense of happiness that it did to Dolores. There was a disquieting sense of evil to come, which cast a shadow over the present; the feeling of happiness was not entirely lost, only a little clouded by the knowledge of many difficulties which would have to be vanquished before he might hope to realise his dream.

This was not the kind of marriage, he well knew, that Virginia's energetic mind had planned,—the marriage that was to utilise all the goods he did possess, to enlist in his service those of which he stood in need.

And though he assured himself he was free, and at liberty to make what use he chose of his liberty, he was yet well aware that his actions must bear the light of Virginia's keen eyes, if he was to know that peace of mind which happiness necessitates.

Habit is too strong to be lightly laid aside, and this habit dated from childhood.

But the memory of the tender sweetness in Dolores's eyes was an incentive to courage; and, arrived at Ingelheim, he did not hesitate, but made his way straight to his sister's rooms. The only additional law he had allowed himself was to refuse a cab, and walk up through the muddy streets under the brilliant setting sun to the Palace.

This gave him a little extra time to think how he was to broach his subject.

"Not easy—harder than ever." So it seemed when, after a knock, he found himself in the red-walled room, for the moment filled with people drinking coffee, and discussing the previous evening's entertainment—Virginia in her red gown the very personification of a brilliant woman of the world, not the character he would have chosen to find her representing.

"Where have you been?" she questioned, with a glance of reproof at the mud on his boots, crossing over to where he stood. "You surely did not forget you were engaged to me this afternoon?"

"Forget!" he repeated, shaking hands with Lady Ellesmere as he spoke, "my dear Virginia! What an insinuation! Do I ever forget anything? I was unavoidably detained," he added, pouring out a cup of coffee, and he smiled as he spoke, and wished that Dolores had been present,—he knew so well the answering smile that would have met

his, and the swift nervous attempt to appear unconcerned.

It was certainly a bore he had forgotten this coffee-drinking. He wondered if he had ever heard of it; at any rate, now he must make the best of it, and thank goodness it was late, and they must soon be dispersing. But whilst so thinking, he was talking much in his accustomed style to those present.

"That is Jerome's charm," Virginia thought. "With whoever he may find himself, young or old, rich or poor, he always does his best to please them; and yet he is not pleased himself to have come in and found people here, though fortunately,"—and she smiled too,—"*that delightful manner prevents any one, even Fanny Ellesmere, from guessing it. Jerome,*" as the door closed on the last guest, "*how tiresome of you to be so late, when you knew I was depending on you!*"

"Late, Virginia,—was I?" with a hypocritical lifting of his eyebrows. "I am sure they saw as much of me as they wanted. Though, to tell you the *truth*, my dear sister—always wise when speaking to you—I *had* forgotten all about it, and if I had *not*, I should——"

"Well, what would you have done?"

She was standing beside him, and she laid her hand on his arm.

"I should,—refrain from anger,—not even have walked from the station as fast as I did. I should have crawled."

“From the station!” she repeated; “where have you been?”

She very seldom asked direct questions, especially of Jerome, of whose movements she was generally well aware; but something in his attitude—he had laid his hand over the one she had placed on his arm—the challenge in his voice, some faint, anxious expression in his eyes, seemed to necessitate it.

“To Waldberg—I went there after seeing you.”

There was no doubting the intention in his voice. If there was one sentiment untouched by the world in her heart and life, it was affection for her brother: a shade of alteration in him was observed by her directly. There was some such shade across him now.

Instantly her mind flew to that conversation they had held, the note she had shown him; and she realised the first faint shadowy warning of danger, which, her experience taught her, sympathy and regret always tend to produce in the man who feels them.

But the very sensation of possible danger restored her determination to view the circumstances well and carefully before committing herself to words,—all her faculties were keenly on the alert as she swiftly passed in review what her next sentence should be.

“And you found Dolly Traherne there, of course?”

Her hand, on which his rested, was still on his

arm; she did not turn her eyes towards him as she spoke, only began pacing slowly up and down the room by his side—an old habit of theirs when discussing anything.

“Yes, I went to see her. I wished——” He paused.

“You wished to confess—you did, I am sure—and she forgave you, I hope? She does not look unforgiving. Did you find out how it all happened?”

“I found out what a brute I had been,” he said, shortly. “Poor child!” For a moment his thoughts travelled back to her frightened tears, and then they rushed back to the present—“And I found out more than that though,” he added quickly; there was a more nervous tone in his voice—“I found out I was in love.”

“Again?” Virginia did not hasten her steps by one second, or raise her voice—the word was scarcely more than a semi-wearied sigh, but it chilled him more than the outburst for which he had fancied himself prepared.

“This is not a case of ‘again,’” he said, and there was a touch of anger in his voice, unwise as he knew it to be. “It is the difference between fancy and love.”

“And which is this?”

“Love.” His voice was slightly unsteady, his grey eyes tender and shining. “And you must help me and sympathise with me, Virginia, dear,” the

anger vanishing, as with a caressing movement he threw his arm about her neck, and touched her cheek with his lips. "Oh, I know everything you can say, I am prepared for it all—madness, folly, insanity; but it will have no effect: besides, I know it all—I love her—and she must become my wife."

"My dear Jerome, have I not sympathised with you, and helped you all your life? You will only allow me, I am sure, to indorse your first words, which, to tell you the truth, I understand far better than your last. But it has always been my fixed idea and my rule through life, that when people have come to years of discretion, they should be allowed to be unhappy in their own way, and not forced to be happy in some one else's, and I am not going to break my rule for you."

He kissed her again; he was immensely relieved. He had feared, he scarcely knew what; but everything, except the cynical good-nature, which was the distinguishing feature in her character—that he had somehow expected would have been pushed aside.

"But that is not enough," he went on, "you must help me: it is not fair to have all the brains of the family, and then not to let me profit by them."

"And what do you expect me to do? Help you to a quick marriage and a speedy repentance? You must observe my saving clause. I said when people had come to years of discretion—now I cannot admit that Dolores has yet reached that point."

“But *I* have.”

“That is not sufficient for my purpose—but no need to despair. She is travelling towards the bourn—it will not be long before she has reached it.”

She sighed. It had cost her a great deal to follow out the line which wisdom suggested. A word too much—one of anger, would have sent him away to pursue in all probability an irretrievable course.

Everything depended on calmness and self-control. The habit of years came to her help, but even with habit as an ally, it was not easy. To gain time, that was the great thing with such a man as Jerome, such a child as Dolores. She had been a fool herself, of course, encouraging an intimacy which held the possibility of such a disastrous termination; but good generalship consists in making the best of existing conditions, not in regretting previous mistakes,—and to Virginia the past was nothing—irretrievable—therefore as nothing: it was the future, with its concealed possibilities, to which she looked.

“You are going to-morrow?” she questioned.

“Yes, but I shall return in a month, if only for a few days, in order to settle things which cannot be arranged in a hurry. To-night I am going to M. Desprez’s to see her—I promised I would after I had spoken to you—and you,”—again that winning voice and caressing touch which she never could resist,—“you will be good and kind to her; she is afraid of you, you know, but all the same she worships you.”

"Of course," Virginia assented, "I will do what I can, but you must give me time. I must think out what is best. It sounds hard and cruel, I daresay, but Jerome, you must go your way, and let her go hers for some time. She is a schoolgirl now, a dear little girl I know, but scarcely more than a child. You must recognise that, and wait at any rate for a year. There are so many things she must learn. It does not do for a man's wife to be ignorant of social customs. Well, we need not talk of that yet," she ended somewhat abruptly, as he turned away with a half-frown, "I will see the child to-morrow, and talk with her, and you will come back, then we can settle amongst ourselves what is best to be done."

"It is very sweet of you to be so kind. Do what you can, my own brains were never of much use in an emergency."

"You mean, I suppose, that they are not equal to getting you out of scrapes. That has usually been our division of labour, has it not?"

"I am afraid you are right. But this time I like the scrape, and do not want to be got out of it, which makes a difference."

"Does it?" She was smiling, that slight mocking smile, which made her eyes so clear and cold.

He was smiling also, but with a different expression in his kind grey eyes.

"Well, *Auf wiedersehen*. It is late, I must go; I leave you to think it all out, but do not fear any want of perseverance this time," and he laughed.

"Perseverance is not always praiseworthy," she retorted, "but a good text is half the sermon."

After the door had closed and she was alone, she paced up and down the room with the same slow even step that she had done when Jerome was by her side. The twilight deepened, the room grew dusk, except for the gleams of firelight which caught now and then the deep red of her gown, the brightness of her hair, the diamonds at her throat.

"Talk about a woman's folly," she said at length, half aloud,—“surely there is no folly to equal a man's! And Jerome, who has loved or flirted with most of the women he has met, not to recognise that this is no more love—Love,”—with a sudden clasping of her hands,—“for a little, unformed, ignorant schoolgirl, with soft eyes and a pretty complexion. Oh no, give me a woman's folly—there is, as a rule, something understandable about it—a man's is beyond the region even of comprehension.”

She paused. She was standing by the picture on the easel, and standing thus, she struck a match and lit a candle on the table near it, and in silence looked at it. In silence, met the eyes with their enigmatical smile, the mouth with its close-held secret.

"You understand," she said at length, "you would not have bartered your future for a trumpery fancy in the present, which a year's absence would have cured you of wishing for,—or perhaps, rather, you could have looked across the present into the future, and been able to estimate it all at its true worth.

"Thank you," nodding her head gravely, "for your heritage. One should be sure of the value of what one is paying for: not to know is a folly of which women are less often guilty than men, or so it seems to me. Excellency, how you startled me! I did not hear the door open; but you are welcome—so welcome. Divert my thoughts, please."

"From what?"

"Oh, they have been travelling about on most uncomfortable roads; but they had at last arrived at the semi-comforting fact that women are more particular about getting their money's worth for their money than men."

"Some women," corrected his Excellency.

"No, Excellency; I really think that, as a rule, men are greater fools in the matter. It is not the high price they pay I complain of, but the manner in which they never foresee if the thing will be worth to them what it costs."

"As a rule, my dear lady," his Excellency replied drily, "the man pays beforehand and the woman after—that is the chief difference, and the money is always laid down less grudgingly beforehand. But generalities always mean personalities. Who is the fool at whom all this wisdom is levelled?"

For a moment Virginia did not answer. She was moving about lighting a lamp, placing candles on the table by the fireplace; but only a moment's silence, then—"Jerome," she replied.

After saying his name, she looked steadily at the old man.

"He is in love of course," with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"That is usually the source of man's woe," his Excellency agreed, "or very often at least; but why should you be bothered by it?"

"I acknowledge that. Certainly," rising quickly, "if we studied our own comfort, we should never care for any one."

"If you fall into the common weakness you may be sure that you will repent it. Those for whom we care take advantage of it immediately to stick pins into us by way of proving what fools we are. That, however, is the outsider's point of view; the sufferers eventually grow to consider that the pins are part of the enjoyment they receive in return for their affection."

"You are wise, Excellency, to take that view, for there is very little other return to be expected."

It was so unusual for a note of bitterness to be sounded in Virginia's criticisms, that his Excellency realised he must indeed have found her in a most uncommonly disturbed state of mind. Jerome's love affairs, in his idea, could scarcely account for it. But almost as he so thought the note had vanished, Virginia had reseated herself, and was looking at him with the familiar light smile.

"To tell you the truth, Excellency, Jerome has played at being in love so often, that now when he

tells me this is the last, the fatal time, I find it hard to believe it."

"Do you wish to believe it?"

"No, certainly not. But apparently I have no choice. He has come here several times, and has found a certain charm in youth and inexperience; he has amused himself by a little love-making—imitation love, of course."

"Imitation love," murmured his Excellency, "is a shifting boundary."

"No, Excellency, rarely. It would not have been in this case had it not been for other causes. I have to thank Prince Lescynski and his photograph for this result."

"You don't mean"—his Excellency was now really roused—"that you are talking of the little English girl?"

"Yes, Excellency, the little English girl, as you so justly describe her, is to be my sister-in-law. Jerome will probably take the first opportunity of telling you all about it. He is full of pride and joy; he has been here to tell me, and now has returned to M. Desprez, I suppose, to talk to him. Papa Desprez will, at any rate," with a little laugh, "be sympathetic."

"And you were not?"

"I don't think that is Jerome's opinion. He expected more sympathy, however. And you? We are old friends; you may tell *me* what you think."

“ I do not think it is a very suitable or desirable match, but——”

“ But that we will keep to ourselves, Excellency. It is much better to make the best of things as they are, than to render one’s self uncomfortable and hot by struggling with adverse circumstances. One says once for all, ‘ What a fool ! ’ which carries the consolation of its echo, ‘ How wise I am ! ’ ”

His Excellency laughed. A minute ago it seemed to him he had been nearer reaching the real Virginia Shore than he ever had done in his life before. For a full minute he had fancied that behind this mocking brilliant woman he knew so well, there was another shadowy woman whose existence he had never suspected ; but now she had disappeared so completely that he questioned his suspicions, though he sympathised with her more nearly than he had ever done before. Returning home, he could not forget her. He had always admired her, though in his heart he was not sure he liked her. But it was, he felt now, as if he had seen some splendid piece of machinery out of order, and for the first time, perhaps, he realised that it was not machinery, but a human heart which was responsible for the actions he had admired. And it must have been a very vulnerable spot that had been reached, for there to have been such disturbance ; ambition, and sisterly affection both struck and answering to the blow.

“ A splendid woman ! ” he said enthusiastically, as he recalled her acceptance of the inevitable. “ No

petty spite about the girl—nothing but the calm acknowledgment of present defeat, which probably”—he smiled at the thought—“she has already considered all possible plans for reversing. Between Jerome Shore’s weakness and Virginia Shore’s strength, I do not foresee a very comfortable or happy future for poor little Dolores Traherne.”

CHAPTER XXV.

“ We shall not then call hardness, force,
Nor lightness, wisdom, any more.”

THE long spring evening had melted into darkness when Dolores's watching eyes became aware of a tall figure hurrying up the narrow garden path. M. Desprez was busy in the study, so that since dinner she had been free to await Jerome's arrival, with no one to scrutinise or criticise her anxiety. She had taken up her position in the morning-room, because its one window granted a view of the bit of road beyond the lilacs of the garden, but she had not moved even when darkness settled softly down outside, and she herself within had become but a slim shadow amongst other shadows. At first she had strained her eyes, but gradually she had almost ceased to think of why she was standing thus, silent and motionless; had almost forgotten for whom she was waiting, while her thoughts drifted back to the memory of the past afternoon.

It was with a rush of nervousness the slamming of the gate, the tread of hurrying feet, brought every-

thing back—the dream was so much easier to believe than the reality. The reality had had time to assume alarming proportions whilst the moments passed, and she knew from the murmur of voices in the room beneath that she, her present, and her future were being discussed.

She did not pace up and down, or even move from one place to another, as some women might have done; she remained by the window, with a child's dread of what was coming, while her clasped hands grew cold and her frightened heart beat more and more quickly. Once she crossed the room, opened the door, and stole down-stairs; and it was only when her fingers rested on the handle that she repented and returned to her post above, a sense of disobedience upon her. At last—such a long, long time since she had first begun her vigil—there was the sound of a quick-opening door, a light rapid step on the stairs, and her name softly called, "Dolly Dolly, where are you?"

The door was ajar, she had not closed it after her descent: it was pushed open, and her eyes, accustomed to the gloom, became aware of Jerome peering in, but her voice would not make itself heard; it was almost as if she had lost the power of speech. But when he turned away with an expression of surprise at the silence and darkness, he was arrested by a low sound and some faint movement, and, "Dolly," he cried again, "are you here?"

"Yes; don't go."

She was hurrying to his side, skirting her way past accustomed tables and chairs, to where he stood. "Why, Dolly," he repeated, "what are you doing in this black-hole?"

"Oh, how long you have been!" unheeding of his words. "I have been so frightened."

"Frightened?" he repeated, taking her hand as he spoke, and drawing her nearer to him. "What are you frightened of—the dark?" laughing. But Dolores did not laugh.

"Are they angry?" she asked, breathlessly.

"You little coward," but he stroked her hair gently as he spoke—the "they" he had no difficulty in translating into "she." "Now, if *I* had been frightened, there might have been some reason. To attack M. Desprez and tell him that the glory of his old age is going to be taken from him, that might well require some courage. Dolly," stopping short, "find a match; I cannot talk in this gloomy, fireless apartment."

"There is a fire down-stairs——" she began.

"And also M. Desprez. No, thank you, I have a great deal to say first. That is better," as she lit a couple of candles, "now I can see you as well as talk, which is a distinct improvement."

"Is M. Desprez disappointed?" she faltered, as for a moment he was silent.

The silence was inspired by a fresh realisation of what a child she was: it was a child's adoring loving eyes that were looking into his; it was a child's

anxiety that was in the faltering voice. He still held her hand in his, he had drawn her nearer to him, but there was some slight indescribable barrier which precluded, or at any rate rendered difficult, the idea of anything except tenderness: perhaps it was her youth; the step that leads from childhood had scarcely been taken, the wondering adoration in the soft eyes did not invite demonstrative affection.

"Dolly, dear," he said, gently, "you must not be frightened; you must trust me to arrange everything. You are very young still, so they all insist, at least."

"I am sixteen," she interposed.

"Well, it is not much, I am afraid; I talked to Virginia, and she says she will think and see what is to be done, and she is so *terribly* clever that I am quite sure she will settle it all right. In the meantime——" he paused.

"Yes," she questioned gently, "in the meantime, what am I to do?"

There was betraying anxiety in the soft eyes lifted to his.

He stooped his head and kissed her, aware as he did so of the quick rush of colour into her cheeks.

"You trust me, dear, don't you?" he asked. "You believe I will do what I believe to be best?"

And as she assented, "Well, I suppose they are right that I must not marry you yet; we must wait

a little. You will stay here for the present, and Virginia will decide what is best to be done, and you will do it."

She nodded. "You will come back——" she began.

"In a month I will come for a few days, and find out what has been settled. You are happy here, are you not?" he added. "You don't sit in this dreary black-hole by yourself, as a rule, I hope?"

"Oh no. I sit with M. Desprez when he is at home; I was only waiting here, because I could watch for you."

There was a sudden rush of tenderness as his eyes, following hers, rested on the window by which she had kept her vigil, a sudden longing possessed him to take her away from all this dulness and constraint, and begin some free independent life, lightened by teaching her the full meaning of the love of which there was as yet but the promise: a momentary longing, of which he well knew the impossibility. But its momentary presence softened his mood into something more tender and protecting than he had ever known before, and tenderness and kindness never knocked in vain at Jerome Shore's heart.

"Well, Dolly," he said, "it is only eight o'clock now, and I am going to stay here till ten, because there are still a great many things we must talk about; but as I am sure we should never settle

them comfortably without a fire, I am going down to speak to M. Desprez first, and see what he thinks. And, in the meantime, you must find me a photograph of yourself to take away with me. I know you have one, Virginia told me."

His hand was on her arm until he had opened the door, and they found themselves at the foot of the staircase. "Come back in ten minutes," he said, "and you will find a great improvement."

A little later, as she was hunting through her treasures for the picture he had asked for, there was a knock at the door, followed by M. Desprez's voice.

"Yes," she answered to the call, and when she had opened the door, and the flaring gas behind her showed her flushed cheeks, instead of speaking, he kissed her, almost as if she had been his own little daughter.

The tears rushed to her eyes, he saw the drops on her lashes, and patted her hand kindly.

"You should not have waited in that dark room by yourself," he said, "no wonder you are nervous! Well, it will soon be all right now. If I were not a lonely, unhappy man, it would never have happened; but there, I will not keep you. The moments of happiness are not to be spared, are they?—but by-and-by, after he has gone, you must come down and tell me all about it. O Dolly, *you* must not desert me!"

"No, no!" she made haste to answer. "Let me stay with you. I don't want to go away."

“If you wish it, dear child, I daresay it will be arranged.”

Theoretically, he had been perturbed at the news. Disturbed at the prospect of his triumph being snatched from him,—but face to face with the girl, all the real fondness he felt for her pushed the other thoughts out of sight,—and it was not to-day or to-morrow she was to be taken from him—something, anything, might happen between present and future; and in the meantime she was happy, and life was only bearable when people were happy. To such men as Charles Desprez to look forward, and weigh everything fairly, denying present apparent good to the young and ignorant, because of clearly foreseen future trouble, would have been impossible. The denial in the present would have been real and painful, the future retribution far off and vague, and with the future, one can never tell what juggling of the cards may be effected. So he had sympathised with Jerome, in a manner that to him seemed the personification of unselfishness, seeing that the loss of the pupil would fall on him; but Jerome with his eager love-story was a real tangible presence, and under the influence of his excitement, the older man was unable to do anything but feel and think with him,—his point of view was the only one for the time, — understanding another is often a mere sympathy of mood, and such sympathy is apt to disappear.

But of all these intricacies of thought, which are apt to puzzle the wisest, Dolores was quite ignorant: it was only of the kindness and generosity of her master she was thinking, as she made her way down-stairs,—the kindness that had kissed her, in this the most important hour of her life, the generosity that had refrained from one word of his own loss.

“It would have made me so unhappy if he had been angry, or even vexed,” and so thinking, she re-entered the morning-room.

The stove had been lit, and was roaring and crackling, the lamp was on the table, the curtains drawn—though in Jerome Shore’s eyes it was a bare comfortable apartment enough, yet it was still a vast improvement on what it had been. To Dolores it was warm and homelike, the homeliness to which she had grown accustomed, and under its more cheering influence she felt her previous nervousness and depression forsaking her.

This man meeting her entrance with a welcoming smile was the Captain Shore she had worshipped afar off; it seemed incredible,—one of those delightful fairy dreams which we dream on a summer afternoon in a lovely garden, and which necessitate no fulfilment to enhance their charm,—that he should take her hand and draw her down into the small chair beside the great arm-chair in which he was himself seated; and then, not releasing her hand, which felt so small and slight in his, stroke

it softly, whilst he examined the little photograph she had brought.

"It is a nice little picture, Dolly, better than none; you look rather like a little frightened mouse in it! How did he frighten you? I expect he talked German, was that it? Because it would be a good thing for me to know." She shook her head, smiling a little.

"No, that would not frighten me now; I understand a great deal more than I did *then*."

"That is a relief to my mind. Shall I tell you why?" He drew her a little towards him, and, with his hand under her chin, turned her face, with its pretty startled eyes, towards him.

"Because they say, you know, that what you require is to learn more. So you must go on, Dolly, and learn quickly, because that apparently is what they all want of you."

"What shall I learn?" she questioned, anxiously. "Please," clasping her hands, "tell me."

"To tell you the truth, Dolly dear, I don't know; we must ask Virginia."

"No, no," it was almost a whisper, "ask some one else."

He looked at her, and then laughed. "Because you would rather be told by some one more ignorant. I agree with you, it would be a hopeless task to try and follow after her. So hopeless, that—listen, I am going to tell you a secret—that long ago I ceased doing anything but admire her, and

gave up trying to imitate. Besides, it would be unfair to have two such clever people in one family; don't you think so?"

"I think you are much nicer." The words came quickly, impetuously, but they were immediately followed by others. "She is the most beautiful and the cleverest woman I have ever seen, but—I am frightened of her sometimes," her voice sinking a little. "It is silly, for she has always been so good to me."

"Here is another secret, Dolly—so am I." He was touched by her loyalty, touched by her childlike confidences, by the caressing touch of the slight hand on his coat-sleeve; she had laid it there when she began to speak, and his still held it in the same place. There was no touch of passion in voice or look; but in every movement was easy to be read the adoring tenderness of a loving child, scarcely any more fear or shrinking from his tenderness than if she had in truth been but a child, and the step, as he knew, between such early love and its fuller development is often a short one. It requires so little care and tenderness to develop the bud into the blossom, but in how many cases is given the necessary care and tenderness? The bud is roughly torn open, never to know the full glory of which it held the possibilities; or by the time it has opened, the soft south wind has ceased to blow, and cold frost awaits the full-blown flower.

"Captain Shore." She had been looking at the

red glare from the stove: she did not turn her head as she spoke.

“Yes, Miss Traherne.”

She smiled, but took no other notice of his ceremoniousness; “I want to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“And you will answer quite truly?”

“I will try.”

“Did I really do any harm the other night—I mean at the Princess’s, when,” desperately, as no comprehension seemed to come to him, “when I cried? It was so foolish,” she went on, as he did not immediately reply. “I did not mean to—only I was so frightened, and I could not think what to say.”

“I shall never forgive myself for getting you into such trouble.”

Startled by the gravity of his tone, she looked round now, never had she seen him so much disturbed.

“It was the vilest selfishness,” he went on, “and even if you forgive me, which I know you do, I cannot forgive myself.”

“Oh yes,” she faltered, frightened at his seriousness. “I forgive you, of course. I was only afraid that perhaps I might have done harm. You are so good, so kind, you might not have liked to tell me.”

“Listen, Dolly.” He leant down and kissed her hand. “If ever I were to do anything unkind or

cruel to you, and you were to come to me, and remind me of those tears, and why they were shed, I should be beyond cure, if they did not bring me to repentance."

"But I don't think you will ever be unkind or cruel," she said, softly.

"One can never tell, Dolly," he answered more lightly. "You must prepare for the worst, and be grateful to me for teaching you beforehand the charm to recover me from the error of my ways."

"But you have not yet told me," she urged, with a shade of anxiety.

"About Prince Lescynski?—no, it was too late to do him any injury. The secret is his, or I should tell you the whole story. He is my greatest friend," he added, "some day I hope you will know him. He has got into trouble here—not through his fault——"

"Yes, you remember you told me," she interposed.

"So I did," the drive home from Ehrenberg flashing across him. "Well, Dolly, follies have done for him what faults do for most people, and it has ended in exile;—and exile, my dear child, is very bad for us." And, as she looked up inquiringly, "I mean that if it was not exile, he would probably like it. He is a soldier, and he is now probably soldiering, indeed I had half a mind to go with him. No, not now; don't be afraid," as he noted the expression in her eyes. "I am not going farther than Thurm at present." She breathed a sigh of relief,

and at the sound he stood up. "Poor little Dolly, did I frighten you? No, I shall not go where I cannot look after you. I suppose it is wise to do what every one says is best, so I shall leave you here, until Virginia has decided what is best, but I shall come back, however, as I told you, when I hear what that is. And in the meantime, you must stay here. You are happy,—truly?" looking down into her eyes.

"Yes, truly."

"And you can write to your own people, you know—if you like," he added, vaguely.

"I have no people," she answered, gently, "no one really belonging to me."

He kissed her soft cheek.

"Poor little lonely child," he said, touched by the words.

"Every one has always been kind to me," she replied, "they have never let me feel really lonely."

The ignorance touched him, the ignorance of what she had missed, and did not even know the want of. Again that sudden longing to take her away, and give it to her all at once, the home love and the lover's love, and under its influence to teach her all she had missed, only through gaining it. A longing, even whilst he was thinking in what words he should frame his good-bye.

"I shall not see you to-morrow, I leave too early, but I shall not be gone so very long,—a month will soon pass." She shook her head disconsolately.

"It is getting late," taking out his watch. "At ten o'clock I have to go to the Princess's, and that is an honour which obliges me to be punctual," and he laughed, but there was no answering smile,—with head slightly averted and bent, she was gazing at the red line of light that marked the door of the stove.

"Look up," he said more seriously, laying his hand on her shoulder,—and as she obeyed, "are you so sorry I am going?"

"Yes." It was a very faint little "yes." "It is very silly I know, but I can't bear to think of your going away, even for a month."

He knelt down beside her, and with his arm round her, drew her head down till it rested on his shoulder, soothing her the while with tender, comforting words, smoothing her hair with soft caresses. There was some tender charm about Jerome Shore that was balm for any trouble. The over-tired, over-excited girl's heart recognised it, and grew calmer under its influence. Here, on the very spot where Jem Traherne had put all to the touch, and laid at her feet the well-tried love of his young years, this other man met his reward for his young untried passion, the one gaining so easily what the other had sought in vain, no echo even of that other voice to mar the perfection of this happy hour, nothing sounding out of the past, not even a faint memory of that other evening. Joy has that cruel power, that it obliterates the past, and reigns alone, and all-

powerful for its little day,—whereas grief carries everywhere with it the fatal gift of memory.

“It was here,” we sigh, “that once we were happy—the sun shone, and no shadowy wings overclouded the sunshine, and memory is only an added pang;”—but with joy for a glad companion we may walk everywhere, and no reminders come, his rare presence not only glorifies the present, but kills the past.

So there was no shadow over Jerome’s tender parting words, nothing to sadden his kisses as he said good-bye, and holding her in his arms promised he would return and see for himself her enter on to the path that was to lead to a happy future. She did not return his caresses, she was shy and embarrassed, but her young heart was thrilled and warmed at his words and tenderness; never could pass from her memory, whatever the future might hold for her, the thought of this one perfect day: it was only when he had opened the door, had passed through it, that with a sudden movement and murmur of his name, she hurried after him.

“Captain Shore,” he had taken a step down the passage, but at the low voice he looked back half-wondering.

Looked back to find her hastening after him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining, where the dim light of a staircase lamp fell across her.

“What is it?” he questioned, stopping, and bending his head a little for her words.

For all answer he was aware of her arms swiftly clasped about his neck, of a soft kiss on his cheek, and a low breathless voice which panted, "I love you, I love you!"

Then he was once more alone, making his way, with what success he could, down the unfamiliar badly lit staircase; while Dolores, scarcely comprehending the sudden vehemence of the emotion which had enforced her parting words, was standing by the stove in the morning-room, dreaming over her love-story.

But whilst she dreamed in the fire-light, Jerome Shore was swiftly making his way into the regions of reality. For ten minutes he also was haunted by the memory of Fairyland. Dolores's words, Dolores's kiss were not banished in a moment, even the muddy dark lane was illuminated by their memory; but when he found himself in the well-known reception-room at the Castle, surrounded by the accustomed faces, listening to the accustomed voices, a curtain seemed to fall, and shut off this from that.

The secret of a dignified life may be, as philosophers tell us, to be independent of circumstance. We are ourselves, of course, wherever we may be placed; but as a rule we do adapt ourselves to our surroundings, more or less, and to men like Jerome Shore the accustomed groove is likely to have a great deal to do with life.

All the usual people were assembled to-night, and

almost immediately after his arrival the door was thrown open and the Princess, accompanied by Prince Adelbert, he with whom her name had at one time been coupled, entered the room.

Well as he knew her, Jerome was struck afresh to-night by her beauty. She was dressed entirely in white, which enhanced the fairness of her complexion and the vivid blueness of her eyes. The sapphires round her neck and at her waist, and the fan of brilliant feathers which she carried, were scarcely bluer than these. Perhaps it was some whisper out of the past, some tender memory in his own heart, that softened his feelings towards her to-night,—he had never felt so distinctly that she was a woman, an unhappy woman, as he did now, when he noted her wearied movements, her restless miserable eyes. Some kindred sympathy, perhaps, helped him to see her as his friend might have done; but with the thought came also the recognition of what that friend had borne, was bearing now, for her sake, and he felt his heart harden again.

“Jerome Shore, neither amusing himself nor others,” his Excellency’s voice roused him, “but standing apart, like a Roman of the Decadence, judging and criticising his fellows?”

Jerome laughed, but uneasily. The uneasy note did not escape his hearer. Virginia’s words were haunting him: he was inclined to wonder what was the state of mind of the offender. But he was in-

secure of his ground, he did not like to broach the subject. Jerome, however, did not give him long for reflection.

"My thoughts were with Dorislaus Lescynski," he said, after that second's pause, and he looked straight at the old man as he spoke.

"Thoughts," was the quiet reply, "are often converted into dangerous toys by being changed into words."

"Yes, Excellency, that is all very well and very wise," Jerome retorted, with swift unusual passion, "but the truth is, that I have a good mind to toss it all up"—vaguely—"and follow him."

It was so rare for Jerome Shore to be stirred into anything like excitement, that his Excellency was conscious of looking at him with a strange interest, as if this well-known man, whom he had known from childhood, had suddenly turned into some one quite different. He did not know—how should he?—that suddenly—reproving the false meretricious lives which he knew so well were being lived around him, and at which, in his lazy inefficient fashion, he rebelled—Dolores's voice and kiss had risen up to rebuke with the memory of their tender purity.

The Princess, in her rich beauty, renouncing happiness, so as to retain her grasp on the shadow of power and the gratification of pride and vanity, which were within her reach, carelessly pushing aside him who had momentarily stood in her path; and Virginia, smiling her cold smile, giving her

brilliant talk to the greybeard by her side—the greybeard whose attentions to any woman were a source of wonder and interest to those about him; for was he not the nearest friend, the intimate counsellor, of Prince Adelbert, the cousin of the late Prince—he who at one time had seemed almost likely to become the husband of Elvira of Ingelheim?

“This was life,” Jerome found himself realising in most unwonted bitterness—a bitterness which found expression in replying to his Excellency’s words.

“No, Jerome, that would never do. We cannot spare you both,” the old man answered, changing his tone, and laying his hand kindly on the young man’s arm.

“Thank you, Excellency.”

Jerome’s smiles had returned, his voice was free from the momentary anger, “For classing us together. I am afraid if I,” with a smile, “had insisted on violently running down a steep place into the sea,—and he, our nameless friend, had remained on in the semi-state of virtue and sanity to which I have attained—no one would have regretted the change.” And as there was no reply, “I am not pressing for an answer, Excellency, even I am *diplomate* enough to know that is forbidden! No, there is no one like him,” with a change in his voice, “and feeling that,” speaking low and quickly, “it is as well as I am not a *diplomate*,—to keep out of the way.”

“Perhaps.”

“A doubting reply, Excellency, but think,—brought up by Virginia, and with you always at hand as an example,—still unsuccessful, is there any hope for me? That sigh means, ‘No.’ To tell you the truth, I am only a shade better than the cause of all our woe. The only advantage I possess, is that I recognise my failings, and keep out of the way.”

“When are you going?”

“To-morrow at seven. I cannot do much harm between now and then, can I? It does not do to boast though, does it? Poor Dorislaus! He certainly holds the advantage, or disadvantage, of being quite original—he is always himself, not made up of lots of other people.”

“Yes.” His Excellency’s voice was low, as if it were his own thought to which he was giving utterance, heedless of his listener. “There are some men, even in this imperfect world, who stand out clear and distinct from their fellows as palm-trees, and serve to accentuate the landscape.”

Some one was singing a sweet German love-song, silence fell on the company, the answer which might have betrayed the unsteadiness of Jerome’s voice, was spared him. When the music ceased, he had another question ready, the dangerous topic had been put aside.

“Excellency, what do you think of Virginia’s latest conquest?”

There was the slight drawl that characterised so

many of Jerome's speeches, but there was an expression of semi-eagerness in his eyes, which served somewhat to belie the carelessness of the tone.

"He has reached the age," answered his Excellency, turning his keen eyes in Virginia's direction, "when to conquer him is a triumph to any woman."

"Are you sure, Excellency, that he has not passed that point, and reached a further one, where conquests become more easy?"

His Excellency laughed. "Sometimes you are very much like Virginia."

"You flatter me. Well, I am going to tell her, the first opportunity I have, that the liberty she allows herself she must extend to me; that 'Example, &c.' It is not fair to blame me and do the same thing herself."

"Is it the same thing?" questioned his Excellency, innocently.

"The same thing—with a difference, of course," Jerome retorted. "I suppose," a trifle defiantly, "my follies are my strong point, and will always be,—but don't you believe, Excellency, in the theory that there are some who would be dear at any price?"

"Surely," replied his Excellency, and he left it to the other to define his meaning, as he turned towards where Virginia stood, "there are some who would still be dear, at any price." Though he only seemed to echo his own words, to Jerome it seemed that, if he could only think them over, they held a hidden shaft.

The little group fell apart as his Excellency approached the spot where Virginia Shore stood, the personification of brilliant womanhood, in her green silk gown, the dragon-flies glittering in her bright hair; to the old man she was more interesting perhaps, because more human, than he had ever thought her. He knew, or fancied he knew, the bitter disappointment thrust aside under that brilliant demeanour. He knew the pride and ambition of the woman, which sought fulfilment, not only in her own life, but in that of her brother, and considered her own wit and beauty, her brother's good looks, charm of manner and position, were all so many cards in her hand towards the fulfilling of such a destiny. And well he knew the bitter disappointment that must possess her to-night at Jerome's decision. He admired her, as he had never done before, as he thought of the force of will which had bowed to the inevitable, and had spared every one, so much as one bitter word. There was something admirable in being permitted to view such a battle as this must have been. "The old Greek idea of tragedy," he found himself thinking, with a smile, as he noted the slight tall figure, the beautiful ringless hands, and slender throat; "a good fight—but circumstances too strong from the first, failure a foretold fact; but the failure coming from the outside—a mortal warring against the gods."

She was alone when he reached her side, her little court had fallen back at his approach, even Prince

Waldenberg, who had stood by her, singling her out from every other woman to applaud her sayings with evident admiration, was for the moment absent.

"Good evening, Miss Shore. I, like most men, wish in my turn to be for a few minutes with the Success of the evening."

"To be seen with her," she amended. "I am only interpreting for most men," she added, "you, Excellency, are different."

"Thanks. I deserved a return for my own compliment, of course, but now, having smoothed the way, you will tell me how it feels. Up there, I mean," lifting his hand, "on your present pinnacle, the admiration of all men, the envy," lowering his voice, "of all women."

"Confidence for confidence, Excellency; it is commonplace, like ready-made bonnets and coats, only one size and fashion is kept, and you must be stock size, or be uncomfortable in a misfit. Go to M. Desprez," she went on, "he will tell you all about it, if you really want to know."

"I should think," his Excellency queried, "that he is stock size?"

"That is just it. *Everything* fits him, and," with a short laugh, "if the laurel wreath does not quite fit, he would rather alter the shape of his head than not wear it."

"Don't be bitter," his Excellency murmured.

"Not bitter," she retorted, "envious. I want more," with sudden excitement in her voice. "Excel-

lency," all at once stopping short and speaking calmly, "why don't you admire and encourage, when I make such brilliant efforts to prove I am not vain or conceited, but quite unlike other women?"

Even his Excellency, accustomed as he was to her, was startled at the change, the sudden retreat, as it were, and disappointed too. It had almost seemed as if he had caught her off her guard, and in such a moment what might not be surprised. It is so true that in dealing with people we are continually in danger of reaching their boundaries, and whether the boundaries are gentle streams or steep bare mountains, they are always alike impassable.

For a moment his Excellency had hoped that he had reached a little by-path, along which, unsuspected, he was going to make his way into the enemy's country, but the drawbridges were up, and the secret, if there were one, had been safely kept.

"Has Jerome been confiding his happiness to you?" she questioned. "Men are, generally, rather given to boring their neighbours under those circumstances, and Jerome is peculiarly expansive."

"No, he only hinted that, as in all other things, it was his sister's example that he was following."

"Mine?" she retorted. "Ah, there are always excuses for every folly, but I defy——"

"Any one to accuse you of folly! Ah, Miss Shore, you must be merciful to those who stop at admiration, and fail in imitation."

“To-morrow,” she replied, calmly, “I am to interview Papa Desprez, and arrange for the education of my future sister-in-law; be thankful, therefore, Excellency, that admiration does not always necessitate imitation.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“The commentary of our creeds is in our life.”

“VIRGINIA will come to-morrow and see you, M. Desprez, and you and she must talk matters over. To you two I intrust all arrangements.”

These had been Jerome's parting words.

“You are both fond of Dolores ; you will, I am sure, settle what is best. In a month I shall return, and hear what has been decided on, though, I fear, not with the hope of inventing a better system. Virginia's systems are always perfect.”

These words M. Desprez handed on to Dolores ; and thus it came to pass that the following morning was spent in awaiting, in fear and trembling, the approaching interview.

There was not very long to wait.

At eleven o'clock, long before either M. Desprez or Dolores had considered it possible to expect her, there was a knock at the door, and Miss Shore was shown into the study. Miss Shore, in an exquisite gown of soft grey cashmere, every detail perfect,

from the diamond studs fastening the collar at her slender throat to the buckled shoe of grey leather ; a perfect picture, in harmony with the fair spring day without, and a painful contrast—so it seemed to Dolores—to her own shabby morning frock. No prospect of early callers justified Dolores in varying her accustomed garb, and there was no Emilie now, with loving, womanly kindness, to suggest when this or that had better be done. But though the forethought had not been there, she was conscious of the disadvantage now.

In the consciousness there was very little vanity : poor Dolores in her vague dissatisfaction had no idea of comparing with this most brilliant woman, but under the circumstances she wished she could have made a better appearance.

“Men are strange creatures,” Virginia found herself thinking, even whilst taking the chair M. Desprez offered, as she recalled Jerome’s charm and good looks, and took in, in every detail, this little unformed, nervous, dark-eyed schoolgirl. “Mysterious creatures, but long experience having taught me that to be a fact, it is useless to marvel now that the personal demonstration is offered. Jerome is not an exception, no one knows that better than I. And it might be much worse,” with calm, philosophic criticism, “she is a dear little thing, always will be, and, after all, life is too short for unpleasantnesses, so we cannot do otherwise than make the best of it.”

And true to her own philosophy, she put aside her

personal feelings, and talked over with M. Desprez, —who was a little anxious as to how the interview might turn,—the best that might be done. “School, Dolores,” she said at length. “I am afraid that is what I think. Six months at some fine school in Paris, say, where they will teach you all sorts of silly things, without which life is impossible.”

She smiled on M. Desprez, and sympathised with him over the loss of his pupil, “Though I fear we should never, even with our joint efforts, have made an actress of her. You must rest satisfied,” she added, “with being able to state that you trained the best amateur voice in Europe, and that will sound better than having to say the worst actress.”

M. Desprez, flattered and amused, allowed her to make her own arrangements, and ended by finding that he had given away his power over his pupil, and had agreed with Miss Shore that, under the circumstances, a first-rate finishing school for the winter would be best. “But for a time, until I can hear of such a school, she shall stay here, where she is happy; you are all kind to her.”

To Dolores it was incredible that such goodness and kindness could exist, especially under such a brilliant exterior; she did not sit down, she stood, a light shadowy figure, by Virginia’s chair, listening to the talk which was to decide her future, thinking only of how, unrealisable as it was, this was Jerome’s sister, striving to help her.

“You have talked me over,” M. Desprez said at

length, "but there is still some one much more difficult to deal with, eh, Dolores? We must get Miss Shore to meet Herr Laurentius—I am afraid he is not so persuadable."

"One at a time," Miss Shore smiled. "You can send for me when he comes, we must not have Dolly tormented." She rose as she spoke, holding Dolores's slight fingers in hers.

"You must come over and have tea with me the first afternoon I am alone, and tell me all about it." This in response to a sudden tightening of the hand she held.

For a moment only—there were so many things in life at this moment which required her fullest and clearest attention—she was touched at the thought of the girl's solitude and dulness, with only this self-satisfied old man as a companion. That things were as they were, knowing Jerome, was not surprising. "What a fool she had been!" With Virginia Shore it was never, "How careless, or foolish, other people had been,"—it was always herself she blamed.

"You must forgive Emilie," she said, holding out her hand—"Madame Lütz, I should say; from what I hear, if you want an additional leaf in your crown, he would give it."

He did not drop her hand; she saw his eyes fill with tears at her words.

"You have reached such an eminence," she went on, "that I feel sure you despise those who have fallen short—one's natural idea of the successful."

"Yes, send for her!" Dolores exclaimed, when the door had closed on their visitor.

M. Desprez's tears had not escaped her sympathetic sight, they served to facilitate the speech that was so often in her heart, so difficult of expression with her lips.

"Ah, Dolores," the man said, "the forgiveness is waiting when she comes to claim it."

"You are so good," Dolores sighed. "She will come, I am sure. I was only afraid——" she hesitated.

"No, Dolores," he replied, kindly, "you need not be afraid. I love her. It seems to me a day never passes without my hoping she will return. That is the father's part"—he was standing up now, and he stretched out his arms with a large gesture of tenderness, which appealed to the little listener. "The power to wound rests with the loved one."

There was nothing theatrical or untrue in action or words to Dolores, it was the acme of tender fatherhood, the mystery of pardoning parental love, which her orphaned life had never known.

There were so many things of importance meeting just at this moment in the life of Virginia Shore, that it had been difficult for her to give undivided attention to Jerome and his love-story, a state of mind very rare with her; but to her clear discerning mind, which was apt to estimate the full relative value of present and to come, there were signs in the

air which foretold a crisis in her own life, and that at no distant date.

She had taken the first step on a path which held a certain issue if she continued in it; it behoved her then well to realise the importance of each footstep, and if she were so minded to turn back while there was yet time.

It was this question which had been occupying her of late to the exclusion of most other topics; and it had required an effort to throw all her intelligence and interest into this other almost equally important subject.

But she had succeeded, had wasted no time in vain regrets, but had done what seemed best and necessary at once; had fulfilled every wish of Jerome's, even to this newly accomplished interview with M. Desprez, and now, with characteristic philosophy, had pushed the subject aside, and had made room for the other matter that demanded her attention.

With a glance at the clear spring sky and the bright early sunshine, she stepped into the victoria with its smart English coachman, and gave orders to be driven into the country.

"Go out towards Ehrenberg for an hour," but even then did not omit to turn her head, and smile towards where Dolores stood watching for a parting look from the window.

"How will it end?" she turned round with that smile on her lips to wonder. "Well," with a slight shrug, "there is no forestalling fate, we must wait

till the first act is over, before we may hope for the second ; in the meantime," smiling, "there is another part I ought to be studying."

It was fully two hours later when she found on entering her sitting-room a greeting in the shape of a beautiful basket of lilac—the card of the donor bearing the name of Prince Waldenberg. The sweet strong scent arrested her attention directly she entered, and it was with a graver air than usual she walked over to the table where it lay, and read the name on the card. A moment later, her eyes fell on a small morocco case, and she took it up half-carelessly and opened it. It contained a photograph of Jerome, and by it was a line, saying it was for Dolores.

With it still in her hand, she walked the length of the room.

"It has nothing to do with his wishing to marry," she found herself replying to some inward voice. "I have *wished* him to marry, it is necessary he should. Nothing to do with the girl herself—she is harmless enough," with a half-mocking laugh. "If he had come in, and told me he was engaged to Fanny Ellesmere,"—she had paused now, and was standing opposite the picture on the easel, and was gazing at it as she spoke,—“I should have rejoiced, opened my cash-box, and seen how much I could afford to spend on a wedding-present. Is that not so ?” She raised the photograph as she spoke, and looked from the well-known features to the picture

before her, with its enigmatical, haunting smile, and was aware then of a sudden consciousness of pain. "No, I suppose I should not have been *quite* glad even then; but I explain it, in the fashion that I would rather sell him than give him away. You understand that, I am sure," looking back at the portrait, "probably have done so all along, whereas it has taken me all this time to find it out. And even that," she added slowly, aloud, a moment later, "is not quite the truth. I should have been sorry anyhow; but I suppose it makes a difference whether one is wounded for a Defeat or a Victory."

She took up the little photograph in the silence that followed her own words, and looked at it again, just for a second, then folded it in a sheet of paper, and addressed it in her strong decided writing, sealing it with her father's seal, which she always wore.

"Life redeems." The quaint words stood out, and attracted her attention.

"Yes, we pay, we all pay in the same coin—with life. Such hard payment, often, in many cases at such high usury, or so we think; but it is a mart where bankruptcy is unknown, eventually—life redeems."

Poor little Dolores, breaking the seal with feverish eagerness in the solitude of the morning-room, sacred to the memory of those past hours, gave no passing thought to the old sage's words, as she drew forth the concealed treasure, and looked at the picture of

her handsome young lover, with something of reverential admiration. She did not place this new treasure amongst the old ones, the idea even savoured of sacrilege. In the one little box, where were hidden her few treasures, she placed the picture; but often during these lonely days, she ran up to the room where it rested and drew it forth, and solaced her loving heart with a glimpse of the kind eyes that had taught her all she knew of love.

In those happy dreary days it came to her that she should write to Jem and tell him of the new hopes that had blossomed in her life. *He* had told her, she remembered, that she might write to her friends, and she also recalled, with a little flush of repentance, that no thought of Jem had come to her at the words.

So at length one evening, when she found herself alone—M. Desprez was dining out—she prepared, as the long spring twilight drew to a close, to undertake the task. It *was* a task, in truth, she felt, when at length, with paper and ink before her, she began to find the immediate difficulty assailing her of what she should say. It was harder than she had expected, and her eyes often roved to the waning light, and pale, greenish-yellow sky without.

“MY DEAR JEM,—Do you remember, when you were here, seeing Miss Shore and her brother on Christmas Day as we came out of church? You will recall her I am sure, she is so lovely. I am going

to be married to Captain Shore. Not yet, because there are a great many things I must learn first. I think I shall go to school, very likely for six months, this autumn. That is what Miss Shore advises. She has been very kind, and I was afraid she would be angry, which would have made me sorry, as I should not like to displease her. She has always been good to me: so has he.

“Dear Jem, I hope you remember him; he is very tall and fair, with grey eyes—and very handsome, I think. I have always loved him, and am so very happy to find he loves me. Perhaps some one else will have told you this, but I hope not. I should like you to hear it first from me, and I hope you will write as soon as possible and tell me you are pleased. Are you getting on well, and do you like it all as much as you expected? It will seem a very long time until I hear from you. I know this is a dull letter, but just now I cannot write about anything else.

“I am very happy.—Your affectionate sister,

“DOLLY.”

It was a very dull commonplace little letter, the last words underlined in a childish way, the writing straggling and unformed, but Dolores read it with satisfaction, and sealed it with a sigh of relief.

As it so happened, no one had forestalled her, and when Jem Traherne received the letter, addressed in the unformed childish hand he knew so well, and

read the simple lines, they told him at first hand the bit of news which meant so much to him.

Until he read the words, it was not revealed to him how much he had hoped, with what certainty of ultimate success in the matter so near his heart, he was working.

He and Virginia Shore were alike in this one trait, that they neither of them shirked the plain meaning of words. They neither of them miscalled Defeat, but recognised at once its full bitter meaning.

This was defeat, he acknowledged, as with the letter in his hand he went out into the crowded badly lit streets of the mining town, where for the present his lot was cast.

Almost unconsciously he walked on, until silence was exchanged for the loud voices; tender, warm, starry night for the flaring gas-jets; solitude for the many passers-by.

Here he paused, taking off his hat, lifting his forehead to the warm night air, whilst he went over in memory the steps that had led thither. It was characteristic of the man that he did not repent, did not even question, if on that distant day in Ingelheim he had made a mistake. No, even now he gave no second thought to that decision, which it had cost him so much to make. There was something admirable in the calm recognition, through all the turbulent grief and disappointment warring within him, that as far as lay with him he had foreseen and

guarded against the future, which nevertheless had conquered him.

There are few people sadder to listen to than those who say, "If——" Life would be intolerable could we not believe that the "If," as well as the Result, rests in wiser hands than ours.

Early religious training, perhaps, unconsciously formed the basis of the strong self-reliance which was the key-note of James Traherne's character, and upon this basis, with fortitude added thereto, there is much resisting force to meet any untoward blow of Fate; but Jem, standing under those alien stars, with his feet firmly planted on the first round of his upward way, needed all the strength of which he was master to fight his battle that night.

There was none of Virginia Shore's worldly philosophy to come to his aid; philosophy which could foresee the future ashes and a cold hearth where the fire glowed to-day, or could find cynical amusement in contemplating its own bitterness and disappointment. No, there was nothing to weigh against the dreary desolate ache in his heart, near which rested the little letter with its few underlined words, "I am so very happy"—nothing, if it were not a tender deep-felt longing that was almost a prayer that the words might be true, and that, not only for to-day, but for all future time.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ But in the world I learnt, what there
 Thou, too, wilt surely one day prove,
 That will, that energy, though rare,
 Are yet far, far less rare than Love.”

THAT letter to Jem was not the only one that her change of circumstances demanded of Dolores. Mr and Mrs Traherne had to be made acquainted with the fact, and *their* answers, at any rate, might speedily be expected. And in due course they came. Some spasmodically expressed curiosity in the man's, many vague questions in the woman's, as to how it had come about? What he was like, and what was she going to do about her lessons, and if she were coming home before going to school? It touched Dolores's heart that allusion to coming home;—it seemed to restore her to the sense of belonging to some one, which in these late days she had missed. It was a very kind letter, Dolores said several times, and she re-read it often. She did not look for anything in a letter beyond a plain simple expression of kindness; anything humorous, or witty, or intel-

lectual—the seasoning, without which we are not inclined to think very highly of our correspondent—would have seemed to her irrelevant and inappropriate. But Mrs Traherne's questions about her return to Beverley, taking for granted it was still her home, the interest in her dress, the clear understanding as to the exact state of her wardrobe, and to what part of it would require replenishing, were refreshing, from the sense of motherly care which she had always received from her, and which she had felt of late, separation and divided interests were insensibly banishing. The girls wrote also nice sisterly letters, or so Dolores interpreted them, and it took time and thought to compose answers, and to Dolores, if such replies were not wearisome, it was because they involved long descriptions of Jerome ; his appearance, his many kind acts, all this with his photograph in front of her, a text for her epistles, to which her loving eyes often wandered for inspiration.

So the time passed, every day very much like the last, until at length the month had elapsed ; and now any moment might bring Jerome Shore back to Ingelheim.

He had written often, letters just like himself, kind, amusing, affectionate, and a trifle egotistical ; but then, as he would have argued, what else but himself was there to write of, that would interest her, an opinion which Dolores would readily have indorsed. And at length : “ Come up this afternoon to tea,” Miss Shore wrote, “ and be prepared to spend

the evening with us. Jerome telegraphs he will be here."

In all her life Dolores had never known such nervousness as attacked her when she stood at the foot of the well-known stairs. In addition to the usual girlish shyness, it was as if it were not till now that she realised the steps taken, the position in which they all now stood to one another.

She wished he had been here waiting, that she might have seen him alone first, it would have been a moral support; but no, she was destined to make her entrance alone, and not only that, but to find only Virginia expecting her, so that the meeting with Jerome would have to take place under her all-seeing eyes.

Poor Dolores! the very thought of it sufficed to deprive her of all power of speech. But that was a matter of more or less common occurrence.

Dolores's shyness was proverbial, Virginia scarcely noted it: to tell the truth, the very fear that rendered Dolores dumb, was a source of slight interest to her companion. No words ever were as trustworthy as her own vision, and, in addition, everything she was privileged to see, every spectacle, as she would have described it, was so much pure gain.

So, having kissed her visitor, she told her to go to her room and take off her hat, and then come back and talk to her. "Jerome will be here before long, I suppose," with a glance at the clock, "though, with

his usual carelessness, he does not, in his telegram, mention how he is coming."

When Dolores re-entered the room, Virginia was seated in her favourite arm-chair by the window, the window from whence was visible the garden and the waters of the lake. The prim Italian beds were not yet planted out, but the shrubs were in full flower, the rhododendrons a mass of crimson glory, crowded round the waters, and were reflected on its quiet surface, the trees were everywhere showing young tender greens, and the promise of summer was in all this profusion of colour. Virginia's eyes turned from the view at the sound of the opening door; colour and warmth and light always appealed to her.

"Something—my artistic perceptions, I believe, is the correct term for the 'something'—is excited and delighted within me at the sight of colour. I know it is vulgar and commonplace, but I prefer it to form."

But at the sight of Dolores, all sense of the outdoor beauty was banished under the influence of a stronger and more immediate sensation. Perhaps she had not seen her for some little time, or more truthfully, had not noticed her; but oh, how shockingly and badly she was dressed! It was characteristic that she added critically, at the same moment, "If it were not for that, she really is rather good-looking, or is going to be. It is a sweet little face, but what a frock! Dolly, come and sit down; yes,

there, if you like, on that footstool. Now, tell me this, when are you going to leave off pretending it is winter?" touching the girl's dress. "The first of May to-morrow, don't you think it is time?" There was a good deal of hesitation and faltering, before the story of Dolores's finances were made clear to Miss Shore.

"But, Dolly, with fifty pounds a-year," Virginia urged, "you surely have plenty to get all the little things you want."

"Yes," Dolores spoke vaguely, "yes, plenty," she added afterwards. "But perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?" Virginia asked impatiently, as she stopped short.

"Perhaps—don't you think—*she* has never written,—Miss Russell, I mean,—and I thought that now——" she hesitated again, and Virginia, in despair, begged of her to explain.

"I thought that *now*," Dolores went on desperately, "she might take it away, as I am not doing what she expected."

"Matrimony," Virginia said, impressively, "abolishes all former ties and promises;" but she had understood at last what the girl meant.

"So you think she will withdraw the fifty pounds when she hears you contemplate another *début*?"

"Yes, so I am saving. I have one quarter's money still nearly untouched, and I am keeping it——"

"But what for?"

“To get new things for school,” she answered, a little nervously. “*They* might notice, and here it does not matter.”

“On the contrary, I think it matters a great deal. But I will write to Miss Russell,—or Jerome had better; as it is his fault, let him bear the blame. And in the meantime, get yourself something light and fresh.”

It never struck Dolores to disagree or to argue. Her plan was a false one, then it remained only to put it aside; had Virginia been any one else, she would have liked to ask for help or suggestion. There were difficulties in the way of shopping and choosing in a strange town, with no woman to advise, which appalled her ignorance; but to ask such questions of Miss Shore, savoured of impertinence. And she did not proffer any advice; she trifled with some pretty many-coloured idle work, talking of many things, asking questions about the past, which had led to the present, the future, that was to come of it. Questions which Dolores answered with a little trepidation, an absent-mindedness, because now, in addition to her former nervousness, was the distressing knowledge that she was shabbily and inappropriately dressed.

It was such a bitter, humiliating feeling, that she could not follow Virginia's words.

“Come in.” Some one had softly opened the door, and was now inviting himself in with these words. Virginia looked up with a word of welcome;

the blood flew to Dolores's heart in such a strong wave, that she was incapable of rising from her low seat on Virginia's footstool, or even of stretching out her hand. But Captain Shore was not disheartened by any apparent want of eagerness. He kissed his sister with his usual affection, and then, kneeling down on the floor beside her, kissed his little *fiancée*.

She need not, after all, have feared and worried over the meeting; even Virginia's presence was quite unrestraining. He lifted her on to her feet afterwards, and stood watching her for a second in silence, as she remained crimsoning and smiling before him; and then, "I'll tell you what, Dolly," he said, confidentially, "I believe you have grown." And when she indignantly denied it, he kissed her again.

"And now, Dolly, sit down again on your nice little footstool, close beside me—there, while Virginia gets us some tea, and ask me lots of questions, and I will tell you all about it."

There was no resisting Jerome Shore. It was the old story, the old charm, that had wiled away the girlish heart in those bygone days, the charm that set every one at ease, and removed all restraint, the charm that found its root in his own kind-heartedness. Dolores found herself wondering what it was she had half feared: had it been, indeed, the thought of meeting him under his sister's eyes? She could smile now at the very idea as she sat listening to his talk, forgetting in the happy present even the shab-

business of her gown, on which the brilliant afternoon sun shone so brightly and unkindly.

And Virginia, on the pretence of ordering tea, left them alone, having seen perhaps all she cared to see, or as much at any rate as sufficed to give her the key-note to the whole.

“And he thinks he loves her!” she said, in a low emphatic voice, with the slightest raising of her delicate eyebrows. “And yet he is not without experience. He thinks,” folding her arms and looking straight at the brilliant sunlight, “he thinks probably, if he thinks at all, that the *difference* makes it love; that because she is ignorant, and innocent, and shabby, and young,”—slowly dwelling on her words, —“that, that in itself proves his case, and if I went to him and attempted to prove it did not—well, the only result would be that the marriage, and the repentance of course following, would take place all the sooner. No,” with an unmirthful little laugh, “as he is a man, the only thing is to leave him alone, and trust that luck may befriend him.”

The splendid sunshine in which she had just stood was all about them when she re-entered the room.

Jerome's fair curls it had turned to gold, as he sat on the broad low window-seat, Dolores, standing by his side, was outlined in rays of glory. He did not drop the slight hand he held at his sister's entrance, only looked up lazily to observe that it was too fine a day to waste, and that he suggested they should go for a drive, “And then Virginia can tell us, Dolly,

what she is going to do with you, because that is what I have really come to find out. But a cup of coffee first, because I have had no lunch, and I am like Dolly in that, that I soon grow faint if I am allowed to be hungry. What is that you say, Virginia? 'Can't have the carriage'—'going out this evening;' well, I know that if I were a strong-minded lovely woman, with all the world at my feet,"—with a low bow,—“I would not be domineered over by an English coachman, I would send him away and get——”

“Well, who would you get?”

“Oh,—an Irishman, he would probably be more obliging.”

Virginia laughed.

“If our father was Irish, Jerome, as I have always been led to believe, he certainly dowered you with more of his birthright than me.”

“And judging from what I have been told, he was himself rather short of the national characteristics, eh, Virginia?”

“You must define them before I can answer you.”

“No, we will have nothing as dry as definitions to-day, we will have a drive, Wilson or no. We are not proud, Dolly and I at least,—and you, I am sure, will inconvenience yourself to give us pleasure, so we will hire a common, vulgar, open cab, and go for a drive, eh, Dolly?”

And thus it was arranged.

What did it matter to Dolores? Her shabbiness

was forgotten. There was nothing but unenvious admiration for Virginia Shore in her cool grey dress, with the great bunch of Parma violets in the white lace at her neck, the soft droop of the grey feathers in her hat, the perfection of her dress, so sadly at variance with the unaccustomed vulgarity of the place in which she found herself. But to Dolores there was nothing wanting. The broad sun shone down on a glad harmonious world, where trees were budding and flowers blooming, and the promise of summer was over all. The shabby old fly with its two wearied horses, trotting along at the ordinary cab-horse trot, the red-faced driver, in his worn coat, were all alike scarcely observed, except as the unconscious means of obtaining her entrance into Paradise.

"I shall have a sunstroke soon if we don't get into some shade," Captain Shore's plaintive voice broke the silence.

"Don't I look rather white and faint, Dolly?" suddenly turning his head and looking straight into her pretty eyes.

"No," she faltered, with a little startled blush.

"How unsympathetic! I thought you would have noticed it at once. Besides it always disagrees with me after a time, sitting with my back to the horses."

"Shall I change places with you?" Virginia questioned, sweetly.

"No, thank you, dear, and you need not be anxious, because we shall soon arrive at the wood,

and be in the shade. I told him to drive there," he added, "because, knowing how fond Dolly is of climbing up dark, steep towers, I thought it would be a treat for her to climb to the top of the Erlthurm. You are pleased at the idea, are not you, Dolly? Don't say you don't want to, or don't care for views, or anything of that sort, or I shall be so disappointed. And see," drawing a novel out of his pocket, with a most descriptive picture on the outside, "I quite forgot to give you this before, Virginia, it is a present I bought for you at the station."

"You might have saved yourself that two-shilling bribe," Virginia retorted, "for nothing would have persuaded *me* to climb to the top of the Erlthurm."

"I was afraid not, dear," her brother sweetly replied, "and so I bought this, in case you might be dull. Ah, here we are," with a sigh of relief, "five minutes more on that blazing road, and I should have been stretched senseless at your feet."

The Erlthurm was all that remained of an ancient castle, and to climb to the top was a common excursion from Ingelheim; but as yet it was early in the year for excursionists. There were three or four people seated round the bare wooden table in the courtyard below, where lived the old guardian, privileged to help out his income by the sale of coffee and beer; but when he came forward to escort the new guests up the tower, Captain Shore politely dispensed with his services.

"No, we will not take you up again," he said,

putting the small fee in his hand. "I know the place well, and will show it to this lady;" and the old man, not ill pleased, returned to his beer and his friends.

"Now, Dolly," as, breathless and exhausted, they reached the top, "now that I have you here all to myself, tell me if you are satisfied with this plan of Virginia's—if you like the idea?"

He was leaning as he spoke against the broad wall which topped the tower; by him, still flushed and panting with her late exertions, stood Dolores.

"No, you need not answer in a hurry," he went on; "take time to get your breath, or I shall have your death on my conscience. I am not going to have you tormented, you know, for any one," he went on more seriously; "you shall be just as ignorant as you choose,"—and he took her hands in his, and drew her a little nearer. "No, you need not be frightened. Virginia is safe down there reading my present—wasn't it thoughtful of me?—and the aged guardian is drinking beer, so you can safely tell me what you think and wish."

"I think it is the best plan," she answered, gently.

"Perhaps," he assented, musingly; and then, noting the half-veiled anxiety in her eyes—"But don't you bother about it," he went on; "it shall all be settled in due time. Miss Russell is coming to see Virginia one of these days—probably will meet her during the summer somewhere—and they will settle the whole business. I only wanted to be sure

you were willing. And you are ?” He put his hand under her chin, and turned her face so that he could see fairly into her eyes. “Well, if you change your mind and cease to like it, or anything, you must just write and tell me, will you ?”

She nodded.

“And in the meantime—it will not be for long, I hope—you will just stay on with that selfish old Mock Turtle down at the villa.”

He paused, silenced by some non-comprehending look in her face.

“M. Charles Desprez, I mean,” he explained.

“He is so good,” she exclaimed, “and so unhappy.”

“Well, you will stay with him, the good unhappy Charles, just for a little longer.”

Accustomed to Virginia, he was constantly being surprised at the limitations of Dolores’s nature ; it is so difficult to realise that very often to be limited in one direction only means wider expansion in another : there were people to whom Virginia Shore’s nature was a limited one.

“Your praise means that he is kind to you,” were Jerome’s next words, conscious directly of the pain his slighting speech had given, when he had understood.

“I do not think he could be unkind to any one,” was her quick reply.

For all comment he kissed her soft cheek.

“You must not let any one bully you, Dolly, except me, of course. If they begin you must write,—

anyhow, you must write every week, and tell me all you have learnt in the week, so that I may be able to judge how you are getting on. What are you going to learn?"

She shook her head. "Oh, everything."

"My dear child, have pity on me, and learn as little as possible. I asked Virginia, but she was very vague. She said, 'Oh, dancing and French.' Now, Dolly, did not I offer to teach you to dance; and French—why, what good is the 'you know who'—the good unhappy Charles," with a smile, which his hearer reflected—"if he cannot teach you French?"

The gloom was banished; his light words had brought back the smiles, his gaiety was contagious.

"It is blazing hot up here, isn't it?" he asked, pushing back his straw hat—"almost as bad as the drive. It would have been tiresome then, but it will be ten times worse if I faint up here. Dolly, what would you do? There, you have smiled. It is very unkind and unsympathetic, but I cannot have you unhappy while you are with me."

It certainly was very hot—one of those premature blazing days that come before we are prepared in any way for their reception, and which are followed by nipping east winds, to destroy any foolish buds that may have been tempted forth to their own undoing. And in addition to the heat of this shadowless corner, on which the full glare of sunshine streamed down, there were some words striving to

find utterance with Dolores, which made her hotter still. They were so difficult to say, and yet, if not said now, when would such a chance repeat itself?

Captain Shore was now standing up, talking in an idle, unwilling way of going, this would perhaps be the last time of seeing him alone.

"Captain Shore," the words reached his ear as he took a step towards the staircase.

"Jerome," he corrected, but she did not repeat the word after him.

"I want to ask you something." He felt her hand on his arm, and stopped short, laying his own over it.

"You will really tell me the truth?"

"Honour bright."

"Did you think, did you notice,"—speaking very quickly, and then pausing in evident discomfiture.

"Dolly," said Captain Shore, severely, "I believe you are crying."

"I am not," she asserted, indignantly, lifting her eyes, but as she did so, something sparkled suspiciously in the strong light,—“what is there to cry about? I only want to know,” desperately, “if you thought that I was looking very shabby and badly dressed this afternoon. It vexed Miss Shore,” she continued, a second later, as he did not speak, half turning away, “and I was so sorry. I explained to her about it,—I had no one to tell me,—and I did not know,” helplessly, looking back to him, “what I ought to do.”

He had remained silent because the words had been so unexpected, he really had scarcely been prepared with an answer, but when he was aware of the soft dark eyes, still fixed on him pleadingly, awaiting his reply, he hastened to speak.

"No, Dolly, assuredly," he said, kindly, "I never noticed anything of the sort. It is only women who find out those sorts of things." And as far as he was concerned, he spoke the exact truth. Without any very exact definition he would have noticed like most men whether a girl were well dressed, but somehow the question never associated itself with Dolores. He was accustomed to seeing her in the simple black frock which she had on to-day, but to wonder whether it were shabby or inappropriate, that was a question that did not present itself. Perhaps one great reason was, that he was used to seeing her alone, he had never seen her on occasions when he might have compared her with other girls. So, "No," he answered, quite truthfully, and was rewarded by the look and sigh of relief that immediately followed his words.

At once, without giving herself time for thought, she had plunged into the same explanation of her finances which she had tried to make clear to Virginia; but Jerome was easier to speak to; somehow he seemed to understand better. Perhaps that little hand, which still nervously, lightly clasped his coat-sleeve, helped him to comprehension.

"Miss Shore says it will be all right," she ended

up, breathlessly, "but I do not know,—and I have no one to ask, so I thought," hesitating a little, "perhaps it would be better to speak to you,—that you could tell me——"

She stopped, her eyes seeking his.

"Of course," he answered, "of course it was much better to tell me, and you may believe me when I say it is all right. Spend the money you have, of course, that is your allowance, and we will settle about the future when the future comes. And if I were you, Dolly," he went on more lightly, "I should start off to-morrow and buy a frock at once. I should get a white one, I think."

"I am afraid that would not be much use," Dolores replied, regretfully.

"Would it not? Well, it would look very nice, and it would wash," he added, cheerfully.

Dolores smiled as she shook her head. The cloud was lifted by his kindness and sympathy.

It was very absurd, considering all the conditions of the case, but the strongest feeling in Captain Shore's heart was a brotherly one towards a little schoolgirl sister; the wish that he would most have liked to gratify, would have been to take her then and there to the town, and select the brightest, prettiest gown that ever delighted the heart of a schoolgirl, but it was a wish he saw no means of gratifying, and something, some instinct, warned him that, in such a matter, Virginia would not be helpful. So he could only feel thankful that he had

been able to set her mind at rest. Yes, she certainly looked relieved.

"Why, Dolly," he said, as they turned away regretfully from the tower to the dark descent that awaited them, "did you really believe that I was looking at your frock? No, I am sure you didn't. You only say those things so as to oblige me to make pretty speeches. Confess it," standing at the top of the staircase, and turning and facing her. "No, there is no use looking frightened, and trying to soften my heart in that style. You must say something very different, or I shall not let you pass, and I daresay in a few minutes, Virginia, at the risk of an apoplectic fit, will come up to look for us."

"What shall I say?" she questioned, hurriedly, with a nervous glance down the dark stairway. "Say that you knew I was not looking at your frock, but at the sweetest eyes in the world. Why, you knew it, of course you knew it, you foolish child. Well, you need not say it," kneeling down on the top step so as to bring himself on a level with her, and putting his arm round her—"no, you may just listen to me saying it for you."

Young hearts may ache for a trifle, a terrible ache truly it seems, but they have the compensation that the remedy is often held in a few kind words. It takes more than that often, later on, to heal our wounds.

When Jerome had taken Dolores home, Miss Shore's maid pacing along behind them, he lit a

cigar, and sauntered back through the Palace garden, where the moon had risen, and was silvering the waters of the lake, and whitening into mystic beauty the crimson glories of the rhododendrons. He was always alive to external influences, and the calm beauty of the May night was in accord with his memories of the day, his parting with his child-love, which had just taken place under Thérèse's discreetly averted eyes. It had been too late to go in, and besides M. Desprez was out, so he had taken her in his arms, and kissed her with frank tenderness in the doorway, aware but heedless of Thérèse's proximity, and then, having enforced a promise she would write often, he had departed. And now, under the budding limes and chestnuts, he was thinking of how happy he was, and how, often as he had fancied himself in love before, yet that this time some chord was touched that had never been awakened previously. It is so easy, as Virginia knew, to mistake the source of any pure emotion, and Jerome's mind was not an analytical one at any time.

He was happy, happier, so it seemed to him, than he had ever been. It is so difficult to know whether the need exists, and is only waiting to be called out of dreamland, or whether we have in truth gained all that we need.

There are so many kindly, contented people, who seemingly could so easily be made happy, but it never quite does to leave out of the account the future circumstances which may so completely alter

the point of view. And it really does seem sometimes, as if that same easily gathered flower, which lies within reach of the kindly and contented, is the only flower of the happiness tribe that may be gathered and possessed. It is a lowly plant certainly, and within the reach of many, but once outgrow the desire for it, and let our mind wander towards blue roses and rare blossoms and scents, we must rest content with far-off glimpses of colour, faint, distant whiffs of scent, of an *à côté du bonheur* just within sight, and but just beyond reach, as the nearest approach to that other happiness, that this world has to offer.

Though he sauntered two or three times up and down the garden, his sister was still waiting for him when Captain Shore returned to her room.

She had changed her dress during his absence, and was now standing, a beautiful slender figure in trailing white, heavy with iridescent beads, a crescent of moonstones in her hair.

Something, some swift comparison between the two women, presented itself, but vanished swiftly as it came: it had passed through his mind however, and his first words bore reference to it.

“Lovely, Virginia,” he said, advancing towards her with admiring looks, “the women who can dress well ought to choose for all the others. I wish you would choose a frock for Dolores.”

There was a nervous look in his eyes, of which Virginia was immediately aware.

"I am afraid," she said, "I don't understand girls any better, I was going to say—but I mean,—as well as you. But if the subject had crossed my mind, I should have done something before to-day ; however, I will do what I can."

He did not answer in words, but kissed her smooth cheek.

"Thanks are undeserved," she answered, lightly. "I hate seeing people badly dressed—it was pain and grief to me to-day."

"Well, I never discovered it, I am glad to say, but then I am in love—I suppose that makes a difference."

"I suppose so," Virginia assented smoothly, "but having no experience, I cannot tell."

"One of these days, lovely Virginia! Where are you going to-night? I forgot to ask."

"To Countess Lorwitz."

"Oho!—and will *he* be there? Does that account for this wonderful gown?"

"Who is *he*?" lifting her clear eyes to his, but there was unmistakably a shade of a blush on her usually colourless cheek, "you are so vague."

But he did not answer, his smile had vanished; there was a shadow of anxiety in his grey eyes.

"You don't mean——" he began impetuously, and then checked himself, calmed into silence by some amused light in her eyes, the mocking smile on her lips.

"What a funny world it is!" she said; "we all want to choose each other's happiness. I wanted you to marry a rich wife, you would like me——"

"Happiness cannot be bought and sold," he interrupted.

"Now there we are again, arguing from different bases. Speak for yourself; say, '*My* happiness cannot be bought or sold.'"

He turned away impatiently, Virginia in that mood was impracticable.

"I am wiser than you," her mocking voice followed him, "for I do not attempt to persuade you to my way of thinking. I shrug my shoulders, and believe you know best what suits yourself."

"And you think," he retorted, "that at least I might do the same. But I cannot let you alone," and he smiled, "I am too fond of you."

"Is that a sign?" she queried. "No," as he was about to speak, "I am only wondering; I know it is the accepted excuse. But with you," she added, "I am sure it is not an excuse. Why don't you come, Jerome?" she went on. "If you will, I will wait half an hour for you," and as he shook his head, "then I must go—I have to call for Madame von Erfeldt, it is time I started."

On the table was a magnificent bouquet of white violets and ferns. She lifted it and held it towards him, with a smile.

"A present from Prince Waldenberg," she said. "By the by," raising her clear eyes to his troubled ones, "is he the *he*?"

Unheeding her words, Jerome turned his head impatiently away.

"I hate the scent of violets!" he said, with most unaccustomed bitterness, but it had immediately vanished, and he was wishing her an enjoyable evening, as he kissed her for good night.

He felt, as he had done thousands of times before, that to be angry with Virginia was impossible; it was useless waste of nervous energy in the face of that unruffled calm behind which she was, perhaps, merely amused. He felt as he had done thousands of times before, that the real Virginia was as unknown and unapproachable as if her actions and motives took their rise in another world. Driving away to the ball, the heavy scent of the violets all about her, "It is very odd," Virginia was thinking, "how exceedingly unsuccessful, as a rule, men are in their dealings with women. If they don't bully, they show weakness—or is it kindness? Any way, I don't think it answers with us—I suppose, because, like all lately liberated slaves, we are apt to mistake leniency for timidity, and take advantage accordingly."

She laughed at the idea, and letting down the window, inhaled the soft night air. "Now the only man I ever met who never was either weak or kind,"

and she smiled in the darkness, "forced from me a great deal of respect,—so much so," she added slowly, "that he is the only person in the whole world that I could imagine myself doing battle with till the end of time."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ Fortune sells many things to the hasty which she gives to the slow.”

WHEN the door had closed behind Captain Shore, Dolores found herself alone in a semi-darkened house. M. Desprez, she knew, was out; he might not be home for a couple of hours yet, she realised when she saw the clock had only just struck ten.

Excited as she was, the idea of bed was intolerable; no, first she felt the story of this eventful delightful day must be told to some one. She had never known M. Desprez other than kind and sympathetic,—she would wait his return.

In the library a fire burnt brightly. Seating herself on a footstool in the chimney-corner, she gave herself up to delightful reminiscences of the past hours.

Once a sleepy-looking maid came to the door and suggested it was late, but—“I want to see M. Desprez,” Dolores explained, “I shall wait here till he returns. You can go to bed,” she added, and the maid, nothing loath, obeyed, and gradually silence

settled down over the house, and with it, the unaccustomed fever seemed to burn itself out of Dolores's veins.

Her eyes became less brilliant, her cheeks less pink, she did not notice how low the fire burnt, as she passed in review all the happy moments of that memorable day. At first the wish for sympathy, or at least expression of her happiness, had been so strong that she had contemplated writing a letter to some one in the old life, and letting them share the happiness of the new. But somehow she shrank from the difficulty of explaining herself in writing to Mrs Traherne, or even to the girls, and who else was there! Strange to say, the one person to whom she felt she could have written, with the certainty of being understood, was Jem Traherne. She was sorry, as she had never been before, at the barrier that prevented it. "He would have understood," she thought, "and been glad that I was happy. I wish, oh, I wish, he had never said *that*! He only said it,"—as if in quick justification to her own thoughts,—“out of kindness, I know, because he could not bear to go away, and leave me with no one to take care of me. If he had only known,” and she sighed, “he need not have said it, and I should have had some one to tell who would have cared.”

But as it was, it could not be,—that she quite understood, so, letter-writing being out of the question, there was nothing for it but to await M. Desprez's return.

And waiting in a silent room in solitude, after the continuous excitement of the day, with closed eyes,—because dream-faces come more distinctly under such circumstances,—is more conducive to sleeping, than waking dreams.

As she slept, the garden-gate was gently opened, and up the narrow path moved a dark-clad woman's figure; it did not disturb her slumbers that a white face looked in round the unshuttered windows, and noted her as she sat by the dying fire, visible through the narrow space between the curtains. A little later, a key was pushed into the house-door, and it was opened with hesitating slow movements, that betrayed the nervous hands at work;—there was again a pause, as it closed softly behind the new-comer, and Emilie Lütz stood on the threshold of her father's study.

Her hands were clasped above her heart as if to still its quick beatings, and then very quietly she turned the handle, but the opening door even did not rouse the little sleeper. Her head was resting now against the wall in the angle of the chimney-corner, her hands were lying in her lap, the long black lashes shadowed her cheeks, and through her slightly parted lips her breath came with the even calmness of a child.

Such a wave of maternal, tender solicitude passed over Emilie's heart as she watched her, that for the moment all her own troubles,—the bitter past, the unknown future, were alike forgotten, as she advanced

towards her. "The child," a voice seemed to say to her, "who had been committed to her care. How had she done her duty by her, or neglected it? What had happened, that she should be sitting thus in this deserted room, hours after she ought to have been in bed?"

There are some women with whom all love carries a tinge of the maternal with it,—Emilie Lütz was one of them,—some tender protecting strain, which would always have wished to stand between those she cared for and any outside trouble.

When at last Dolores, roused by some slight sound, opened her eyes, it was to find Emilie seated by her side, watching over her, waiting her awakening.

At first there was no strangeness in the apparition, no more than in the unaccustomed position in which she found herself, her eyes heavy with sleep, her limbs cramped with the long-continued discomfort of her position, but in a moment it had all rushed back, and, "Emilie, dear Emilie!" she cried, throwing her arms about the elder woman's neck, "you have returned?"

"Yes, Dolly." There were tears in Emilie's eyes, and it was easy to see how thin and white were her cheeks, how hollow her eyes. "I have come back, because I am in great trouble, and can only hope that my father will help me."

"Oh, poor Emilie, do not be afraid," Dolores answered, kissing her again, "he will forgive you, he is only waiting to forgive you."

Emilie sighed. "Ah, Dolly, you do not know, there is so much to forgive. I would not have dared to come, if it were not——"

She broke off, the tears fell too fast for her to talk, she leant her head on the table and sobbed. Dolly, kneeling beside her, could only repeat, "You need not be afraid. He is so good, so good."

There seems to be something in human nature, in some of its forms at any rate, that makes it always ready to play the part assigned to it; some dramatic instinct in all of us that, of itself, forces us into the position that the spectator expects.

Cowardice vanishes when courage is taken for granted.

M. Desprez, entering at that moment, hearing Dolores's words, somehow felt himself slipping into the position that they assigned him.

It was so true. Had he not been waiting all these months, a lonely, heart-broken father, only waiting her return, to offer his forgiveness?

There was a lump in his throat and tears in his eyes, as he drew near to where Emilie sobbed, with eyes hidden in her arms, Dolores kneeling beside her.

"Oh, forgive her," Dolly cried. Except for those sobs, Emilie was silent.

"She is very, very unhappy, and so sorry, and she has come back."

"Oh, Dolly." The hand trembled that M. Desprez rested on his daughter's bent head. "I think you

know that it is not necessary to plead much: you know how I have hoped she would return."

"Father." Emilie rose up, looked at him, the tears on her thin cheeks, the slender hand trembling that rested on the table. "Father, it is not only I you have to forgive."

M. Desprez turned away, and took an impatient turn through the room.

"He is ill," Emilie's faltering voice followed him, "very ill. He cannot work or do anything for us. I have done all that I could, but now there is nothing left to do—I have come to ask your pity," there was a half-pause after the word, "for both of us."

He was silent for a moment after she had spoken, with head bent, and then looking up, across the intervening space, his eyes fell first on Dolores, kneeling in the same position as when she had knelt by Emilie's side, but now, with eager dark eyes turned towards him, awaiting his words. Eager, but yet withal assured, did she not know the words that would come? and from her to Emilie,—such a pale shadow of the Emilie he remembered,—and something spoke here also, some tug at the heart-strings, then he stretched out his arms towards her.

"Emilie, daughter!" he cried, and folded her to his heart.

"Both of us?" she faltered.

"Both," he repeated; "so I suppose it must be."

They had forgotten Dolores; by-and-by she crept away to bed, and presently Emilie followed her, to

kiss her for good night. She was half asleep, but at the murmured words and the kiss she stirred slightly, and, "Oh, Emilie, I wish you had come back long ago; I have wanted you so very much."

"I was afraid," Emilie murmured.

"But you need not have been. He is so kind, so good," Dolores said, sleepily; "oh, you need not have been afraid."

And Emilie, in her own little deserted room, cold and dreary, found herself in a mesh of wonder as to whether it were so? If she had indeed miscalculated him with whom she had had to deal, misunderstood him altogether, and done him a wrong which no tears could now wipe out?

It was impossible now to realise her own feelings in the past, and a different solution of her difficulties wearily presented itself, as she plaited her long black hair. Had it all been a mistake? Had all she had endured been unnecessary? Had nothing been demanded of her, but the courage which was so foreign to her nature?

And this was the end, to creep back with this terrible story of failure, which seemed of itself proof of the false road she had taken. We are so apt to judge ourselves, as well as others, by results. "If I had known," Emilie said, "how good he would be"—and yet, even while saying the words, she doubted.

And it was not for herself alone that the moment was bitter. Poor woman! Ill and worn and dispirited, and with the prospect of greater ill to come,

she would not have shrunk from humbling herself, in the hope of help. After all, he was her father, and had been, in his own way, for many years a kind father; but it was the thought of what it all meant for one far dearer than herself, one whom now in her own heart she no longer associated with success on earth, but whose days she felt—try to hide it as she might—were numbered: it was for him, who cared so little for himself, that she dreaded the morrow.

She foresaw it so clearly; the strong, successful man affording pity and forgiveness, out of his strength, to the weak failure.

Poor Emilie! It was a dearly bought reconciliation. It is so easy, or so difficult, according as we are constituted, to say we are sorry; but having thus said, forgiveness does not put us back where we were before: and that night, through the doubt and desolation warring in her tired frame, Emilie vaguely felt the great truth, that the deeper the repentance, the less the chance of future happiness. Something must be pulled down, or built over, to make the known world once more habitable,—and that necessitates another life.

Down-stairs, M. Desprez, pipe in mouth, his slippered feet on the fender, was repeating to himself the words that had passed this evening, rehearsing, in imagination, those that were to greet him on the morrow. Even thus in solitude, the tears now and then rose to his eyes, as he pictured these long

months in which he had been alone; the readiness with which he had forgiven, would forgive, if by so doing he could bring back to his presence his only daughter. Even at the price—he shrugged his shoulders—of stretching a forgiving hand to the man who had persuaded her to the unfilial act of abandoning him in his old age.

“When I saw him, and recognised that his failure, perhaps in part, bore reference to ill health”—involuntarily his thoughts had assumed a colloquial and explanatory form, they were scarcely thoughts so much as a prophecy of future words—“ill health, which it was easy to see, held no promise of recovery, what could I do? I was never a hard man—and my only daughter! What is there for a father to do, but to forgive?”

He sighed, and with the sigh returned to a more vivid consciousness of the comfort and joy there was in a pipe, and slippered feet, and a good fire, especially when, in addition, we are soothed with the inward reward of having deserved well of our conscience.

On the morrow, haggard and worn after a sleepless night, Emilie started for Wilhelmstadt. She was to take with her an olive-branch, in the shape of a message of forgiveness to the partner of her misdeeds. An olive-branch that was not hidden away out of sight, but was carried in her father's hand ostentatiously; which entered with her into the beautifully appointed brougham, and came out at the station,

and was waved in flaunting ostentation over her shabby bonnet, as with bent head and eyes fearing recognition she hurried along by his side, and which seemed to bud forth into richer foliage as he arranged with the stationmaster for the conversion of her third-class return ticket into a luxurious first.

It was the first step of the return journey that was to bring her back to those who had known her all her life she felt, as she met the kindly curiosity in the official eyes, which glanced with pleasure at the different points of the drama—from rubicund, important M. Desprez to his nervous, shabby daughter.

The whole world—their little world—she knew had shared his loss and sympathised with his distress, and now it would be called upon to admire his magnanimity. It was only to spare her that there were no congratulations offered while she stood there; directly she had gone——

Yes, she was quite right in her surmises; while the tears were falling fast under her veil, almost as the train was in motion, the guard was by M. Desprez's side offering his congratulations. The very words seemed to reach Emilie's over-excited brain, as she turned away from the window, and for the moment was only conscious of the blissful luxury of solitude.

“Ah, thank you, thank you”—Desprez's hand had grasped that of the stationmaster—“it is only through the sympathy of my friends that I have

borne it at all. But she has come back. After all, treat us as they may, the day dawns when they find there is no affection to equal a father's. And the father's part," he added, impressively, "is to wait till they discover it."

"You will get your reward, sir," his listener answered. "There are few who would be so forgiving."

"She is my only daughter," M. Desprez answered, and sighed. There seemed nothing to add to that.

That night, the last evening of the weekly *réunions* at the Palace this season, M. Desprez was quite the hero of the occasion.

The news of Emilie's return and of the welcome that had awaited her was well known by that time in little gossiping Ingelheim, so that when he entered the room, congratulations, to be more or less overtly offered, were in readiness on every lip.

"And that is the blessing of having to deal with a man like Charles Desprez," Virginia announced, in answer to some hesitating voice as to whether the subject ought to be alluded to; "one need never avoid anything. If he had committed murder, he would expect us all to crowd round and sympathise with the discomfort he must be enduring at the memory of what he had done. His Excellency agrees with me, I am sure?"

"You prophesied the day of reconciliation, you remember, Miss Shore, months ago? I have such

confidence in your prophecies that I have only been awaiting it. To tell you the truth," he added, drawing closer to her, "I feel rather sorry for Madame Emilie and her rebellious husband. I don't think Desprez's house will be a pleasant one for a broken-down, disappointed, unsuccessful man to end his days in."

"Your pity is thrown away, Excellency. There will be no disagreeable allusions or reminiscences, because that sort of thing makes me, Charles Desprez, so uncomfortable; and besides," lowering her voice, "now that there is some talk of the little English girl leaving me, it would really be too miserable to be left alone, with no one to look after my needs. Why, I should be obliged to marry, and can you imagine anything I should dislike more?"

His Excellency laughed.

"I suppose you are right; but Madame Emilie is not a successful advertisement of self-willed matrimony."

"Did I not know and warn?" Virginia retorted, with a droll imitation of Desprez's voice and manner—"did I not try to save her from the end that I, the loving, anxious father, so clearly foresaw? Now she has learnt what I would have saved her the pain of learning—the general and deplorable unsatisfactoriness of man." And as the listener laughed, "Why, Excellency," she added, "to spare her that discovery, I meant her to be a Spinster for ever, and

live in my house, and stand between me and all worry and discomfort to the end of time."

"The unselfishness of man," was his Excellency's comment, "shows itself in so many, and such unexpected ways."

"No, Excellency," she replied, drily, "not *unexpected*, when it is the great Desprez with whom we have to do."

"For shame, Miss Shore, to malign him, one of your most ardent admirers!"

"Did I malign him? It was quite unintentional, for the admiration is mutual—we admire each other."

"And the little English girl?" his Excellency questioned after a moment, "if it is not indiscreet——"

"Indiscreet? No. Indiscretion presupposes secrecy, and here there is none. We are only anxious"—with a momentary scarce recognisable bitterness, which did not escape the sharp ears of her listener—"to call in the whole world to rejoice with us."

But a moment later he almost doubted if it had not been an effort of imagination, so entirely had it vanished.

"You know, Excellency, I am sure," she was speaking confidentially, and leaning a little towards him, "that Jerome and I never fight? Well, we almost came to words before he left, on the advisability of each one selecting his own form of hap-

piness. He thinks Dolly will make him happy,—far be it from me to try and dissuade him,—he *may* be right, you know.”

She paused interrogatively, and it did not escape his Excellency that the other side of the quarrel was not mentioned—what Jerome had wished her to do, or leave undone.

“Men know very little about love,” she went on, presently.

“Some men,” his Excellency interposed, gently.

“Oh, I am not setting up as a preacher on that subject,” she answered, quickly. “I know nothing about it; but I cannot help noting results. And I never saw a man yet whose love could stand daily worry——”

“Perhaps,” interposed his Excellency again, “because it was not love——”

“A paradoxical escape, Excellency, from an unpleasant statement.”

“May be—may be.” It was unusual for his Excellency to speak seriously to Virginia; it was generally sharp retorts and amusing worldliness he sought from her; but for the moment something stirred within him, and made him more serious than he would have wished to appear. Virginia’s smiling, half-scornful words, the little English girl whose childish eyes and tender smiles he remembered, Jerome’s kindly eyes, which he had seen smile on so many, and over and beyond these, the Princess, languid and dissatisfied in all the pride of her

beauty, but with some haunting look which met his own now and then, and told him that she remembered,—all that, if it were only possible, she would willingly forget; and far away, banished from all he cared for, he whom he could not forget, that scion of an unlucky race who had won his way into the old man's solitary heart. "It may be his fault," he said more earnestly than he usually spoke, "or only his misfortune; but I admit the fact—a man's love can rarely tame itself down to everyday patience and forbearance, even—when a great deal depends on it. It is a wild thing, that must show itself when and where it chooses."

"And, like most wild things, Excellency, out of place in a drawing-room! Now, my theory is, that with 'he' and 'she,' one, as a rule, is always made uncomfortable, and I certainly prefer it should be 'he.'"

"And probably so it will be," his Excellency rejoined suavely, all the momentary earnestness had died out of his voice. "If people only have a distinct knowledge of what they want, they can generally obtain it."

"And are prepared to pay the price," Virginia added, with a slow glance round the room, which rested for a moment on the Princess leaning back in her chair, listening with scarcely feigned interest to the talk of him who stood by her side, in her hands the historic fan, with its glittering diamond ornament. The wandering glances came back at

length to his Excellency's face, with some ill-disguised amusement in them.

"It is open to question," his Excellency remarked, imperturbably, as if in reply to the mocking smile, "whether it is worse to fear the price or to consider there is nothing worth it, *nothing* in the world worth paying for."

Virginia reddened a little, as if the words or the tone had found some ill-defended corner. "We do not all use the same coinage," she retorted, quickly, "or perhaps our coins don't represent the same value to each of us. But what we want,"—all traces of irritation had vanished again,—"*is always worth paying for.*"

"My dear young lady, my only advice to one so far above the need of advice is, Be sure you get your money's worth."

"Thank you, Excellency, I will treasure up that wisdom against the time. And here is M. Desprez,—I can hear the olive-branch rustling, and can see his smile all ready to melt into tears,—I must go and congratulate him on his conquest of the 'old Adam.'"

His Excellency watched her with half-concealed amusement as she turned towards M. Desprez. "What a comedy," he smiled, "and yet with such a difference!—Desprez a humorous Tragedy, and Virginia a tragic Comedy." His smile vanished as he approached the Princess; for this woman, no light half-laughing definition came into his mind.

She was thinner—yes : and yet, he assured himself critically, that fact in itself was not apparent except to a careful observer ; she was not thin enough to detract from her good looks, which, of course, was all that mattered. He found the slight sarcasm travelling unconsciously through his mind, before he had met and rejected it, with the answer that he had outgrown the age of slight sarcasms. But there was something, some shadowy expression, in the vivid blue eyes which was taking the place of the once familiar restlessness and dissatisfaction ; something—but vague uncertain expressions are better left nameless, so he pondered, with an old man's kindliness, even as he wondered if Virginia Shore had left it nameless.

“It must be terrible,” he thought, “to live under her eyes, and to be endowed with only an ordinary woman's heart, with all its workings more or less visible, and more or less in order, instead of a stout old-fashioned suit of armour.”

He had arrived at such an age, or was possessed of such a nature that he could feel sorrow for any one pursuing their own clearly mistaken way to a clearly foreseen unhappy end, sorrow without anger. He had foreseen, he had warned, once he would have saved, now he recognised the moment had passed by, and his feelings towards the past had grown almost impersonal, as he looked into the future which had escaped the control of her who had once had her hand upon its issues. And it does not do to

give up our hold on the reins if we hope ever to regain possession of them. The exact conjunction of circumstances which offered us the mastership of our Fate does not recur; almost before we have realised our rejection of it, it has become part of the unreach-able past.

Good sound philosophy every word of it; and yet philosophy is thankless food on which to attempt to feed a hungry human soul. Starvation diet. Perhaps it was this knowledge that brought the wave of kindness that flooded his Excellency's heart as he drew near and noted the ill-concealed languor of the figure, the unconcealed weariness in the lovely eyes.

"Excellency," there was relief in the tones of the voice that addressed him, perhaps it was occasioned only by the fact that the word was dismissal to the tall, nervous-looking young man, to whom such divided attention had been given, for she seemed to have nothing to add, and his Excellency remained standing in silence by her side.

"I am tired and dull," she said suddenly, looking up with that rare smile which banished the dissatisfaction with the swiftness of sunshine, and was one of her especial charms, "dull, and have nothing to say."

"Dulness," the old man retorted, "consists more often in not knowing when we have nothing to say, than in silence." He smiled as he spoke; though he often disapproved, he fell under her charm,—just

as often the charm was perhaps in part the perfection of physical form and colour,—he would ask himself the question at times with an able man's candour, and then shirk the answer. "But if you want to be amused," he went on, "you should honour some one younger and gayer than I—Miss Shore, for instance."

"Yes." She moved uneasily, "But gaiety," she added quickly, "is not the cure for every ill."

"Not for every *ill*," he assented, "but for dulness it is the accepted specific."

There was no audible accentuation of his words, and yet she winced under them.

"Change is the cure, I suppose, for that malady," she answered, a certain defiance hidden away under the soft *trainante* notes of her voice. "Well, to-morrow I shall try it."

There was an interrogative look in her eyes, an interrogative tone in her voice, as she lightly waved the fan, which, moved thus softly back and forth, caught and reflected rays of light from the gem which had hidden the secret of the poison.

"Change is a *palliative*," the old man replied, "but change cannot take us back to the time when we had not suffered."

Dead silence. And then: "Forgetfulness," she said, with a discordant little laugh, "does all that for us."

"A synonymous term for change, is it not, or

perhaps rather the poisonous flower of a poisonous seed ? ”

“ Poisonous,” she echoed, sitting more upright and speaking more decidedly, “ why, without it, all the happiness of the present might be spoilt by some hateful, evil memory.”

“ Do you think,” he answered, gently, “ that we always know what is good, and what is evil ? ” He knew so well the passionate nature which was uttering this cry of one unaccustomed to pain, and which, stirred to tumult, was finding a vent in easily understood speech, easily understood by one who, like himself, held the key. At his words, perhaps some tone in the voice, there was a sudden swift softening in the expression of the eyes which were raised to his, in a moment, as it were, there had vanished the proud passionate woman, with the ill-regulated acts and words, that he knew so well, and an unhappy girl had stepped into her place, and was looking to him, with quivering lips and tearful eyes, for comfort — or help — which was it, which should he offer ? and almost as he hesitated, in the second that the doubt was there — there was a change, and Virginia’s voice, clear and musical, was in his ears.

“ I have done what I could, Excellency. Don’t look doubting—I have indeed. The forgiving parent feels himself quite the hero of the hour. It is almost as interesting a part,” with a smile, “ as that of the *bereaved* parent ! But my applause is not sufficient,

Princess," bending her graceful head, "you must speak to him, and applaud too."

"Sometimes," his Excellency was thinking, as he went to look for M. Desprez, the bearer of the Princess's message, "sometimes in this unsatisfactory world we get so near to people that we seem to be within reach of their souls, but the moment passes—the world, the flesh, or—Virginia Shore," with a smile—"I suppose, are to blame! They come between, and we are set afar off again."

But he performed his mission correctly, nevertheless; brought M. Desprez, with a sort of subdued radiance—which Virginia noted and epitomised immediately he had gone—to receive the Princess's words, kind words, on his daughter's return. He listened with a distinct, amused sense to Desprez's excuses for his own generosity. The generosity which had remembered that for so many years, she, Emilie, had been so much, that, for the sake of the past, he had had to accept the present. "And to be happy," he added, with his charming smile, "one is prepared to forgive—why, anything——" He looked from one to the other as he spoke, but it was to the Princess his words were addressed. "To our children," he added, softly; and there were tears, real tears, in his eyes.

His Excellency looked aside with a swift, remorseful pang that he had been amusing himself with apparently mock heroics, which, after all, were real; as if he had criticised simulated agony on the stage,

to discover when the applause had died away that the actor's words had been wrung from his own heartbreak.

The Princess, leaning forward, with slightly quickened breath, said in her soft, musical voice, with a sudden answering tenderness, "Ah yes, M. Desprez, to our children indeed what is there we would not forgive?"

Only Virginia Shore's clear, unswerving eyes never quitted the man's face, the faint, shadowy smile still hovering about her lips. And as he turned away, his voice so tremulous that he could do no more than acknowledge the words of the Princess.

"Excellent, excellent," she murmured. "He adds that unmistakable touch that no training can give—it is the gift of genius."

"Or genuineness?" his Excellency queried, as she seemed to appeal to him.

"I prefer to believe it is genius," she retorted.

"On the whole a rarer quality," the old man returned; "for I suppose it means, as a rule, working with less suitable tools."

"It is the result I care for," the girl answered; "and just now I felt as if I must cry 'Encore,' which is a tribute surely to his powers."

"He is very unhappy," the Princess said, "and it is easy to understand; she is his only child, he must have missed her terribly."

"Ah, Princess, you are charitable," his Excellency

replied. "I am glad there is another view I may adopt if I choose."

"What a wise reservation !" Virginia laughed ; " but I concede something. He *thinks* he has been very unhappy, and he *thinks* to-night he is very happy, and over and above all he is conscious of bowing to his public, and accepting well-merited applause."

CHAPTER XXIX.

“Every human soul leaves its port with sealed orders. These may be opened earlier or later on its voyage ; but until they are opened, no one can tell what is to be his course, or to what harbour he is bound.”

AND so the curtain fell.

The Princess and the little Prince went away, and with them departed the brilliance which the presence of the small Court lent to unimportant Ingelheim ; and in the lengthening summer, Dolores, with Emilie once more as a companion, was free to enter by the private door into the Palace garden, and wander about, as on those first days, by the water-side.

There was a difference, though, between then and now — the difference that the slowly approaching shadow that will shortly darken the sunshine is sure to give.

“He is better to-day, Dolly,” Emilie would say sometimes ; “he had a better night ;” but her eyes did not meet the girl’s honest, steady look as she spoke, and Dolores, too unsophisticated to prevaricate, too uninventive for a hopeful word, would only

kiss the worn cheek in a silence more expressive than the strongest dissent.

For in a far-off room, which had once been Emilie's schoolroom, where the piano still stood on which she had played in her childhood, the unsuccessful musician had laid aside all worldly ambitions, and was awaiting that other judgment which perhaps shall award the crown differently from the decision of earthly awards. He had fretted a little at first: it had been a bitter trial returning in his weakness to eat the bread of charity granted by him whom he had wronged.

And yet amid all the mistakes and sorrows of his life, this was after all but a small addition, a little added humiliation to one whose sweetness and gentleness rendered humility impossible to embitter.

For a moment he had felt overwhelmed in his weakness and pain, by the large overpowering presence, breathing such an atmosphere of superabundant life and strength, whose firm, white hand had touched his slim, trembling fingers, and whose voice shook as he murmured, "For Emilie's sake—I can deny her nothing,—I cannot even allow her to suffer the penalty of her own folly,"—and mingling with the forgiving words, had been some faint tone, some unexpressed thought which had passed by, a subtle wave from the one man's soul to the other—"And also from such a poor devil as you, it would not be worth while for such a one as I to withhold my forgiveness."

And so strangely are our human hearts made, that hurrying away from that room, it was pity that was uppermost in Desprez's heart. He would never have given him a passing thought,—just perhaps a passing reflection that it was as well,—had he been told of Antoine Lütz's death, but to be brought face to face with him, be able to realise the suffering and exhaustion, was almost unbearable.

To himself, he would have said in extenuation of his own course of action that a palliative may be found for all mental distress,—that it is emotional, and to be cured therefore by opposing emotions,—but for actual physical suffering, he felt there was no such relief, and he shrank from all approach to it, all words even, that might bring its reality before him.

It was his first and last visit to the schoolroom, which, with its double doors and heavy curtains, was completely separated from the rest of the house, and it may be fairly doubted, as time passed, and the sway of the past under Emilie's *régime* once more re-established itself, whether there was much reality to him in the man who lived under his roof.

It was a trouble, a painful, therefore-to-be-avoided trouble,—there were many such in the world which could not be helped, and therefore were best not realised. And with such natures, not to see is not to realise, and in time, incredible as it may appear, not to realise is to forget.

It may safely be asserted, that very soon Charles

Desprez, going his healthy, prosperous way, his daily life filled with the many duties and cares which his position necessitated, his fame augmented by the halo that glorified his private life, had ceased to give a thought to the dark shadow that lay in wait, on the other side of the curtained door.

And on this side, it was a comfort to have Emilie's careful tenderness watching over his wellbeing as of old : the household, which had grown a little lax and careless, returned to its former groove,—there was no fear now when a telegram came postponing dinner, or ordering a late supper, that there would be no one at hand to see that things were arranged as he wished ; no fear now when he returned from a late rehearsal, or a visit to the neighbouring town, that there would be an empty fireless room to return to, just when he was in the humour for a little cheerful talk, with an interested, understanding listener.

“Perhaps, after all,” the thought would sometimes flash through him, “it would not have been as well if all had remained as it was ; she had learnt,” looking at her thin cheeks and tired eyes, “the falsity of selfish gratification of her own pleasure, the unsatisfactoriness of sentiment.” He paused,—his pipe had gone out, and he rose to relight it. And standing by the fireplace, he stooped to where she sat on her once accustomed seat by the fire, and kissed her. “You must never leave me again, Emilie,” he said, “I cannot tell you what I went

through without you. I gave up my youth to you," he added, his rich voice trembling, "you must not desert me in my old age."

"No, father," she answered, softly, "I shall not leave you again." But though she responded thus, and at once, in words, there was vague bewilderment in her brain as she passed her hand across her forehead. "What had he given up for her?" The question seemed sacrilege, and yet it would obtrude itself, but she shrank from attempting any answer.

Her life was happier now, if the truth were told, than it had been since she had left her home.

The love which had given her the courage to brave her little world had been an unnatural, momentary courage, entirely foreign to her nature, and born of the longing to protect and help one sorely in need of help and protection.

The moment had passed, the apparent futility of her action had shown itself, the life for which she had been endowed with that momentary courage she had seen failing, and failing more rapidly for the requirements that she could not grant; and then, in addition, she recognised that a time was coming when her own health would require care, and so with tears she acknowledged at length there was nothing to do but retrace her steps, and see what humility and penitence might effect.

And it had done all that she had dared to hope, even to those few words, that touch of the hand which had extended the forgiveness to her hus-

band, and, in addition, not a word to remind her of the past, of the gap between then and now; on the contrary, every attempt to cover over the gap with silence, until there seemed every chance of its being entirely forgotten.

“Is it waywardness—is it ingratitude,” she found herself thinking, “that I do not want the past pushed aside?”

She looked up, some such words framing themselves on her lips; her father was still beside her. The kind touch of the hand that had smoothed her hair was still perceptible to her senses, giving a sudden freedom of thought which seemed about to find relief in words, but the words refused to come, as she met his eyes smiling down on her through the smoke of the cigar he was lighting.

“No, no,” he said, between the puffs, “we suit each other. Do not think because I mentioned it that I grudge the past,—we understand each other, we are happy together,—that is my reward, that we are now happy together.”

For a moment, into his daughter's eyes darted a flame of grief—passionate grief—which seemed as if it must find relief in words; words indeed throbbed in her brain, but her tongue refused to give them utterance.

Happy! when he knew, must know, the anguish of her soul, the terrible martyrdom that these past weeks had been!

But before the words were spoken, the habit of

self-control had reasserted itself, her trembling fingers and quivering lips were the only signs of the sudden strain upon her powers.

Almost fearfully, at length she looked up,—dreading some answering emotion, or worse, some angered annoyance,—to discover that he was not looking at her, but was leaning back in his old leather chair, puffing comfortably at his cigar, about his eyes that kindly expression that his own words had brought there. It stilled her, calmed her, as no words could have done; she rose, putting aside the little garment on which her dainty work had been spent.

“Good night, father,” she said, gently. The unusual storm had subsided, but of a sudden this warm, lamp-lit room, with its bright fire and atmosphere of general overwhelming satisfaction, had grown suffocating; it was a relief to find herself in the colder, dark passage, to lift the curtain, and, passing through the swing-doors, find herself in those shut-off, carefully shaded rooms, where a man, propped up with pillows, sat by the fire writing. “Working still,” she said; “O Antoine!”

“The working hours that remain are few, dear.” His eyes, brilliant with ill-health and excitement, were lifted to hers as he spoke. “Remember, Emilie,” stroking her cheek gently with his thin hand, as she knelt beside him—“remember always that *this*,” touching the score on his knee, “is the defence of my life.”

"I will remember," she answered, gently; "but you must live," she added, "to prove," flushing a little—"to prove that *you* were right," and he smiled.

"No; but I shall live to finish it," he said, with quiet confidence. "It is the test," he went on, "which I shall leave behind, and by it my apparently unsuccessful life must be tried."

"*Apparently*," she accentuated.

"Oh, I do not doubt," he replied, gently. "I am too near the great Reality to judge of anything by appearances. I did right in refusing your father's offer, of that I am assured. To accept mediocrity, so as to save ourselves activity, is voluntarily to renounce higher possibilities."

"But, Antoine, is it not possible"—Emilie's voice wavered a little—"that the one might be the stepping-stone to the other?"

"Ah, Emilie, it does not do to take one step towards the bank which we do not wish to reach, not even for the sake of pleasing: the first step may be to please some one else, but the second will be to please ourselves. It is always easier to go on than to turn back."

Emilie sighed, and kissed him. The eyes were brilliant with the enthusiast's fire as he spoke, and it cast its reflective glow on her; nevertheless, she sighed.

There was some quality in her—fainter, certainly, but which had its stronger root in her father's char-

acter. She could not live except in an atmosphere of approval; and it is so ordained, that to require such an atmosphere in this world necessitates compromises.

“Take care,” Antoine had said to her once; “the chief source of difficulty in this most difficult world is, that we all want something from the Enemy, and he takes care that very often it shall be offered at a very low price.”

He had had no doubts about his marriage, arguing that he and Emilie had done all they could to obtain their ends openly, and that her father’s behaviour had freed her from obedience, and him from any consideration. The unfortunate breakdown of his health, and consequent poverty, just when he had hoped to attain independence, was, to his creed, a misfortune, which had to be borne like any other of the arrows of fate, and the bitter humiliation which his helplessness had at last made it impossible to reject, more especially with Emilie’s future becoming a matter of anxiety, was the punishment of what he adjudged to have been a mistake. “And mistakes in this world, Emilie, are just as often punished as crimes.”

“It is an unjust world,” Emilie answered, curtly, her heart full to overflowing.

“No, Emilie, not an unjust world—I don’t believe that; but the justice is on too large a scale for comprehension. It is easy to reach that point where evil seems strong and successful, and good weak, but

it does not do to formulise from one life. Good is the result of a succession of mistakes, which, maybe, is only discernible after many lives have been sacrificed in the struggle."

There had been no answer.

To women it is more often the individual life than the result of the struggle that appeals. They grudge the one life given for a cause, which, after all, perhaps they only half-heartedly appreciate.

"It is the result, naturally," the weak enthusiastic voice went on, "that affects others, and therefore, in respect of our neighbours, it is our actions that are most important; but for ourselves, for our own souls, the action matters little: it is the motive which ennobles or vilifies our lives."

Poor Emilie! it was a rest sometimes to pass from the two whose rival claims on her life were so strong, and whose views of life and its necessities were so much at variance, to the little English girl, whose loves had no *arrière-pensée* of doubt, and whose tender affection for herself was so true and honest.

It was a relief to Emilie's over-troubled heart to hear Dolores's frank unwavering admiration for M. Desprez, expressed in the strong certainty of her affectionate young heart.

"He is so good," she would repeat often, when occasion arose for some anecdote of the master of the house during the time they had been alone.

And when the want of comprehension between

him and her other friend—for Dolores was steadfast in her loyalty to the sick musician—was forced upon her,—some diversity of opinion on a point of doctrine which brought out the antagonism of their natures,—she would put it aside with a child's confidence that there was something she did not understand.

“People often think differently,” she would tell Emilie, as they sat sewing together during the hours that Antoine slept and M. Desprez was abroad—“*I* know that;” and her mind would travel back to many a scene of her childhood, where Mr Traherne and Jem had certainly not been in accord. “But they may both be right,” she added, a little vaguely, “and after a time they understand each other, and are sorry they were so angry,” the old story still serving as a text. “If only——” She paused, and, flushing uneasily, crossed the room and kissed the elder woman with a sudden sob. And Emilie, returning the embrace, with her ever-gentle maternal tenderness, understood quite well the little suddenly arrested sentence. “If only he could live—that is the chance he needs.”

But Emilie was older, she had lived through more, perhaps understood better both characters, and in her heart there was another ending to the sentence.

“If only it were possible to hope that death may effect what life has failed in.”

But Dolores's love and tears and smiles were very dear to her; sitting together, they very rarely talked

of the sorrow that was so close at hand, far more often it was of Dolores's wonderful love-affair, and of what would be the result of the school to which she was to go directly Miss Shore had decided about it, and whether even a school of such pretension would convert her into the kind of woman that Miss Shore hoped.

"I don't think so," and Dolores would shake her smooth brown head. "I cannot even exactly find out what it is I need, or rather, there is so much, I don't know where to begin."

"But Captain Shore is more important," Emilie replied. "Ask him what he wishes, and then learn that."

"Yes, I did that—and he told me."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Learn to dance.'" There was a perplexed look in Dolores's eyes.

"That is very easy," Emilie answered. "You can go to Herr Albert's dancing-class directly."

"Oh, I can do nothing," the girl answered uneasily, "until I hear from Miss Russell—about the money, you know. I do wish she would write."

"Probably she was not at home when Miss Shore wrote to her," Emilie suggested, but though she said little, she was also anxious for this letter for which Dolores looked. It might make so much difference if Miss Russell, wealthy as she knew her to be, still adhered to her protection of the girl. But it was, as she knew, a very different matter befriending a girl

who was destined for a profession that might cast glory upon her as well, as the patron and recogniser of unknown genius, and mere unrewarded friendliness to a girl who had sunk out of sight as the wife of a poor officer in a German regiment. But she did not share her doubts with Dolores—let her hope, as long as she could.

And the day came when they were set at rest, though it is a truism to say that doubts rarely prelude the exact trouble that is approaching, any more than hope heralds in the especially longed-for triumph.

It had been a lovely, cloudless, summer day, and Dolores had spent it nearly all alone. M. Desprez was away, and Antoine had been suffering, the heat oppressed him, and Emilie had scarcely left him. So Dolores, wearying of the confinement of the house, had been sent by Emilie—a freedom seldom accorded her—to walk in the Palace gardens.

She had let herself in with M. Desprez's key, and had wandered under the trees that led to the little gate, the trees, under whose bare branches she and Jerome Shore had so often loitered, and which now interposed a thick leafy screen between her and the June sky, and so, slowly past the Italian beds, with their vivid splendours of scarlet geranium and yellow calceolarias, down to the borders of the lake, where so long ago poor Antoine Lütz had told her the tragedy which overhung its waters.

To-day the blue sky was reflected on its broad surface—another blue sky, on which softly rocked innumerable white lilies. The garden was deserted, except for two or three gardeners; one of them spoke to her, a kindly, big, elderly German, who knew well all about the little English girl, and was sorry for her loneliness, living in the midst of all that trouble yonder, and no companion to say a word to.

He spoke a few words of the beauty of the day, and asked after the invalid, and Dolores, whose German, though not very good, was more fluent and intelligible than it used to be, was glad to stand by him and watch him as he worked. "Herr Lütz is not so well to-day," she said, in answer to his question, "Madame Emilie could not leave him, so I had to come alone."

"Poor lady," the gardener said sympathetically, "she's being sorely punished for her disobedience."

"But don't you think," Dolores began timidly, "that people ought to marry those whom they love best? You see she was not like a child."

"Parents know best," the man returned. "Now you see, Miss, it stands to reason, they can't wish their children to be unhappy; what they want, is to save them unhappiness, and they're older, and they know better."

The argument certainly seemed to Dolores unanswerable, especially with the man's clear blue eyes looking straight into her own.

"Have you any children?" she asked, weakly.

"One daughter, Miss."

"And is she married?" Dolores pursued the subject somewhat eagerly.

"Yes, Miss. And that's just what I was saying. I knew Hans all his life. I knew his trustiness and soberness and honesty, and everything about him to be right, or do you think I would have let a girl, let alone my own only daughter, join her life to his?"

"But then she thought so too," Dolores persisted. "She loved him,—but suppose she had wanted to marry some one else?"

"She'd never have been as happy with any one else, Miss, and I knew that, because I was her father, and cared for her."

The words seemed coming back in a circle. Dolores's young mind could find no way out of it, no possibility of applying the one case to the other.

"Supposing *she* had had a father?"—it was very seldom her imagination supplied her with those, the absence of whom had made so bare her life,—“but supposing—and he had cared for her, and had thought—meaning well and kindly by her, like M. Desprez, thinking he knew what was best, like Adolf Hart, and had forbidden her to love Jerome Shore, what would have been the result?”

"No, she did wrong,"—her friend's voice brought back her straying thoughts,—“and when we do wrong we are always punished.”

His blue eyes, which were so mild and kind, were at variance with the severity of his words. "But sometimes," — he took off his cap as he spoke — "sometimes the devil sends the punishment, and sometimes God, and when it is God who sends it, it is easier to bear."

It was a curiously uncomfortable kind of doctrine, Dolores felt; it seemed to leave so much to a vague chance, and she looked anxiously towards the man, as if hoping for some further and more comforting words.

"Death, I guess," he said meaningly, setting to work again, "is God's best punishment; it hurts less than a lot of others."

But to Dolores's young childlike heart, full of the sweet strong power of life, there was little comfort in the saying.

Afterwards, as she walked slowly home, her hands full of sweet-smelling roses which her friend had given her to take to the poor lady, the subject still preoccupied her, a shadow of that first realisation that there are opposing forces, in both of which are to be found particles of truth, and that it is their nice adjustment that constitutes justice and right, a fact which is the hardest of all to reconcile to the strong one-sidedness of vigorous confident youth.

The first, and perhaps the highest price we pay for experience, is the freshness that made us so confident of the correctness of our false views and mistaken judgments. "No," Dolores thought, as she

closed and locked the little door behind her, and stepped out into the narrow road, over which were falling the soft shadows of a balmy summer evening. "No, death is worse than anything else, because it takes people away, and we can never tell them any more that we are sorry, even if we wished to."

She was thinking of him under whose roof she lived, and her mind was so full of the perplexity of the question that the sound of voices, borne on the evening air from the open window above, only vaguely arrested her attention, and before she had realised they were familiar, the door was opened, and Emilie stood on the steps, her finger to her lips, as if to warn her to silence.

"Hush," she said gently, as Dolores began an eager whispered question. "No," shaking her head as the word reached her ear, "No, Antoine is better; he has slept, and is refreshed. I have watched for you, dear," she went on in a low voice, drawing the girl as she spoke towards the study, "because I want to speak to you first. Miss Russell is up-stairs."

They were inside the study now. She closed the door softly behind her, and for a second did not speak, only looked at the girl with some new, half-doubting, half-fearing expression, which frightened her.

"It is something about me, then," Dolores said, and her voice trembled. "Emilie," and she clasped the older woman's arm nervously. "There is nothing

wrong? Nothing has happened"—with quick-rising fear—"to Captain Shore?"

"No, no." Emilie put her arm round the slight childish figure, and could feel as she did so the frightened fluttering of her heart. "Do not be afraid, there is nothing to be afraid of. Herr Laurentius has come with Miss Russell."

"Is he very angry?" Dolores interposed anxiously.

"He scolds a good deal," Emilie smiled, "and talks very loud, but that, you know, is his way; it is no use hoping to correct him. Miss Russell had gone to Berlin to see him, and that was how she missed Miss Shore's letter."

She paused, as if wishing her hearer to derive some information from this fact, and so she did; for, "O Emilie!" she exclaimed, "then they don't know—about Captain Shore, I mean—oh, I cannot tell them," clinging closer to Emilie as she spoke.

"No, dear," she answered, soothingly, "they did not know when they came, but I told them—Miss Russell, that is. She had come to tell you something else."

The words fell at first unheeded, as Dolores gave Emilie a little affectionate hug, and then a kiss of gratitude; but the latter words recurring to her, "What has she to tell me? Not bad news, you promised," a little nervously.

"No, not bad news," Emilie answered steadily, looking straight into the clear sweet eyes. "She came to tell you that she has found your mother."

Over the face she was watching passed a sudden

swift flame of colour, and noting it, "They must be pleased with her," Emilie's kind heart thought; to her loving eyes the girl was pretty enough to please any mother; and then she had grown white as death, and was clutching on to her companion as if she were losing consciousness.

"Don't be frightened," Emilie's encouraging notes sounded in her ears. "She is a good kind mother, and is longing to get back her little daughter, without whom she has lived these many years. I wanted to tell you myself," she added, gently, "because I knew it would be a shock, though a happy one; but now I must take you up-stairs, and you must hear all the particulars."

Dazed and bewildered, still clasping Emilie's hand, Dolores prepared to obey. She said nothing till they were approaching the drawing-room, and then stooping, she whispered in Emilie's ear, "Who is she?"

"The Countess Justine Miramar. She is the widow of a Spaniard, but she is English."

The strange foreign name was ringing in Dolly's dazed brain, when the door was opened, and she found herself in the familiar drawing-room, with its open windows, through which the cool, scented, evening air entered, mingling with the fumes of cigarettes and the aroma of coffee. On the hearth-rug, rounder and fatter—so it seemed—than on the occasion of his last visit, stood Herr Laurentius, a cigarette in his hand, with which he was wildly gesticulating, his face red with the vehemence of his argu-

ment and the heat of the day combined. In an arm-chair facing him, talking almost as vehemently, and also smoking a cigarette, sat Elinor Russell.

"Ah, here is my godchild," she said, in the quick vivacious tones that Dolores remembered so well,—turning her head, and holding out her strong white hand on which the diamonds flashed. "Come, Dolores, I am longing to see what you have turned into."

She took and held the girl's two slight hands and looked at her intently for a minute, and then, without letting go her hold, and turning to the man: "Well, Professor," she said in German, "what is your opinion? I can see she is taller, and older, and better dressed, and all those sort of things; but now, what say you?" with an amused laugh, "is she pretty?"

Dolores coloured a little, but when she met Miss Russell's amused eyes, she smiled too.

"Mademoiselle is good and pretty, and everything that is charming," the old man said, gallantly; "but," his voice rising, "I shall never forgive her, never!"

"Neither shall I," said Miss Russell, composedly, "because I am just reaching the age when I meant to adopt her, and keep her as the slave of my whims. So we have both reason to be disappointed."

"Disappointed!—you," growled the Professor, "what does that matter! A spoilt woman of the world deprived of one slave. Get another," tossing his arms about; "go into the market, buy one, steal one,

what do I care? but do not compare your loss with mine."

"What nonsense he talks, doesn't he, Dolores?" Miss Russell went on. "Sit down here beside me until he has finished his cigarette, and then we will send him away, and I will talk to you. I have to lock myself out of sight at Beverley when I want to smoke," taking another whiff at her cigarette, "that is one of the reasons I like countries where it is accepted."

It did not surprise Dolores, though this explanation was evidently for her benefit. In her long residence under M. Desprez's roof she had grown accustomed to many novelties to which her previous life had been unfamiliar.

Perhaps the training that had taught her to accept all the facts of life, which were to her unusual, as "his way," or "her way," and therefore not to be judged by "my way," which was Emilie Desprez's habit in a household where so many customs ran counter to her own, had not been a bad method of learning to meet the world whenever the day should come.

She was glad Miss Russell and Herr Laurentius wanted to finish their smoke first, it gave her slow and troubled mind time to think over the stupendous revelation that had just been made. The foreign name still rang in her memory like a charm. "Countess Justine Miramar, her mother."

And the curious thing was that there was no con-

sciousness of any such want or blank in her life which this lady should fill. Homely old-fashioned Mrs Traherne was her mother—ah, who shall ever say good fails of its reward!

No passionate gratitude filled this girl's heart; it very seldom even passed through her mind to be thankful to the Trahernes for the fate they had saved her from: there was no idealisation of Mrs Traherne, nothing to set her apart or above her neighbours. She simply was mother—sometimes kind, sometimes cross—but whose intentions were of course always good, and therefore above criticism, and whose presence left therefore no room in her young life for this new-comer.

“Now, Professor,” Miss Russell's voice roused her, “you have grumbled and complained quite enough, and as you don't encourage my patience by listening to my grumbles, I must postpone the rest of yours.”

“It is a crying injustice,” Herr Laurentius vociferated, “she will have a mother, a home——”

“And a husband,” interposed his hearer, “don't forget that.”

“Yes, and a husband, and what is the use of a husband, pray? She would have done a thousand times better if she had remained with me. I would have made her the greatest singer——”

“And the worst actress! You know you told me Desprez—or was it Virginia Shore—said so.”

“Ah, Virginia Shore,” the old man growled. “That is the way of women,—who cares for their

opinion? An evil, envious, jealous, mean-spirited, race——”

“Yes, yes.” Miss Russell bowed, “We leave all the virtues to men—so good-tempered, and just, and well-behaved, and polite——”

Herr Laurentius snatched up the box of cigarettes. “I shall go,” he exclaimed, “you support her in it, you have all supported her. It is folly, and she will repent it! To have such a voice and such training,”—pausing theatrically,—“and to wish to give it up—for a husband.” He scowled at Dolores as he spoke, in such a manner as to leave no doubt as to the wrath of his sentiments, and, stirred out of her dream, she rose up a little frightened, but still steadily approached him.

“Do not be angry, please,” she pleaded. “You have been so very good to me, all of you,” her voice faltering as she looked round the darkening room, “I don’t know how to thank you,” and she laid her slight fingers on the old man’s hand, “but I shall never forget; and what I have learnt,” lifting her shy wistful eyes to his, “you can never take away, however angry you may be, so I must always be grateful to you.”

The frowns smoothed out of his forehead. “You are a very sweet little girl; you remember,” looking defiantly round the room, “I always said so, and it does not matter how badly you behave—with your husbands and suchlike folly—I shall always be fond of you.” His shaggy eyebrows worked in rather an

alarming manner, but Dolores, standing quite close, saw that the eyes, seen through the spectacles, were quite kind, and remembering all Emilie had once told her, felt reassured. She gave a little nervous squeeze to the hand that clasped his.

"Yes, you are a very good, sweet child," he repeated, and then glaring angrily round towards Miss Russell, "and through the advice and assistance of your *friends*," with a scornful accent on the word, "about the biggest fool I know!" And with these words, hurried out of the room.

Miss Russell laughed, even Emilie smiled.

"What a rough creature," Miss Russell observed, "but what a good heart! That is why I love him. Come, Dolores, that's over, now let us consider things. You have heard,—Yes?—well, now sit down beside me, and I will tell you all there is to tell."

"I will come back by-and-by," Emilie said; she touched the girl caressingly as she spoke. "It is a happy prospect, of that I am assured."

Elinor Russell looked with a certain amused interest from the one to the other, watched Emilie till she had left the room, then looked towards Dolores, who was following her vanishing figure with unconcealed affection.

"She is a good woman, I am sure," she said then,—"that limp, feeble-looking creature!"

"I think her so very pretty," Dolores hazarded timidly.

Miss Russell laughed.

“Do you?” she said, questioningly. “Well,” looking with sudden keen-eyed directness at her, “perhaps you are right, and I am sure you are fond of her.”

“I ought to be indeed,” Dolores replied warmly, “she has been like a sister and a mother together to me, ever since I came here.”

“A mother.” Miss Russell caught at the word. “Well, Dolores, listen now, and I will tell you all about it.”

Afterwards the tragic story of the woman, whom she was to learn to call Mother, was always associated in the mind of Dolores with that balmy, early summer evening, in the quiet, unimportant little German town;—the barely furnished drawing-room, with its polished boards and stiffly arranged furniture, the big white stove, gleaming vaguely through the dusk, the curtains waving softly to and fro, as a slight breeze rose with the stealing on of night, the scent of the bunch of pink roses in the blue bowl beside her, where she and Emilie were wont to sit and work, and the one strange unaccustomed figure amid all these accustomed surroundings, the figure of Elinor Russell in her well-made English travelling dress, plain and unornamented, with its straight white collar and cuffs, so different from the clinging draperies and graceful garments of Virginia Shore. Something manlike about her, to Dolores’s unsophisticated eyes, unused to English customs and fashions. Something manlike also in the grey hair which she wore tossed straight back from her low

straight forehead, in the thick wave which Dolores remembered. Miss Russell was not a woman to change her manner of hairdressing for any chances of fashion. The thick coils of hair were plaited simply as had been the way in her girlhood.

But though her appearance lacked something of feminine grace and softness, and her voice was always somewhat louder than is customary, yet there was the nameless stamp of ladyhood in all she did and said, and in addition, though her laugh and quick retorts came so readily, they were surface symptoms; deep down beat a strong reliable woman's heart, to which one might turn in one's hour of need. Every one who knew her trusted Miss Russell, and the good that she did in her independent wandering life was known by many a poor, unfriended, unrecognised man, whose password to her favour was the recommendation of a friend. Miss Russell had very few female friends; women, even in their female friendships, require a veil of sentimentality, a very thin veil perhaps, but it must be always there, and this was a necessity Miss Russell could not supply. Probably the reason that had rendered possible that friendship with "all sorts and conditions of men," which had distinguished her life.

And Dolores, listening to the decided voice that sketched in that past, which was in some wonderful way to become eventually the background of her own life, felt gradually creep over her the rest and strength that this other woman's strength and

trustiness offered,—felt the glow of the warm heart that would not fail those weak ones who turned to her for help. She had always stood a little in awe of her, and had dreaded her arrival, her vexation, which would show itself, possibly only in laughing mockery, but mockery that might be painful to bear.

Perhaps Dolores had grown much older, though unconsciously, perhaps the frank honest soul of the girl met and responded to some corresponding honesty in the woman's, and meeting there, she understood her better than she had done in bygone days. And to understand her, was to cease to fear her. No one winced under Miss Russell's laugh and sharp retorts,—which were so unsparingly, some said so gratuitously, truthful,—as they did under the unspoken, unexpressed mockery of Virginia Shore's clear eyes,—the delicate, half-veiled subtleties of her distinct swift words.

Frightened and half-prejudiced as she was against this woman who was rising out of the mists to lay a possessive hand on her young life, gradually as she listened Dolores's tender heart was touched, as she heard the story of the young beautiful mother, losing, first, the little baby-daughter by the swift mystery which had left no trace behind, then of the awful tragedy that had bereaved her life of an idolised husband, whilst she yet sat apart sorrowing over the first grief; of the years of loneliness between then and now, whilst she had waited, hoping at first, following every clue, and at last

had sunk down into the stillness and patience which are the outward signals of despair.

Then of the casual way the story had first reached her—Miss Russell; of the intuition which had seized her, and set her to work on dates and seasons, which had at last brought her to the conclusion that there was enough to warrant her intrusion on the lady, and laying before her such facts as she was possessed of. Times and seasons tallied; in a moment it had seemed to the lonely mother that the hour of reward, for all these woful years, was at hand,—the life which had frozen down into a narrow routine of petty duties and cares now seemed warming into a fresh chance of renewed youth, and she had desired Miss Russell at once to go and fetch the girl and let her see her.

“And so I have come, my dear Dolores, to take you to her. She wished to come with me, but I decided better not. Better, I thought, for you, that you should have a little time first to adapt your thoughts to a new idea of life.”

“Yes?” Dolores said, questioning, as she paused.

“This lady,” Miss Russell went on, “is a young woman still, as we count youth. She is no older than I am, that is——” but she hesitated. “She has had a great deal of trouble, Dolores—she is a Roman Catholic, she has taken refuge from her trouble in the Church. I do not mean,” she went on more quickly, “that she is a nun. She is a very good woman, a really good woman, and the Church

has been a help and comfort to her for many years. Most women, my dear, when they are in trouble," she added, with a short laugh, "fly to the Church—or the World—for comfort."

Dolores's uncomprehending gaze brought her back whence she had strayed.

"So you see it is better to be prepared, though I daresay she will get younger and worldlier when she has a pretty young daughter to dress up and take about with her."

"You don't think," Dolores began nervously, "that ——" she paused. "About Captain Shore," she faltered.

"Captain Shore," Miss Russell repeated. "Ah yes, of course, there are other things to be considered. And so you are going to marry Virginia Shore's brother; do tell me, my dear, how that came about."

"Do you know him?" Dolores's eager eyes were lifted, full of anxious tenderness, to Miss Russell's face.

"Know him? Well——"

What she had meant to say was not easily said under those eyes.

"I know malicious Virginia better," she said instead.

"She has been so good to me," Dolores answered steadily, but a little red flushed into her cheeks at the words. "I thought she would have been very angry and disappointed at Captain Shore wishing

to marry me, but she has been so very kind, and has helped me as much as she could."

Miss Russell was silent, though it was always an effort to her to withhold speech, and the blunt thought that sought expression was, "What had been Virginia's object?"

"Is Jerome like his sister?" she asked, presently.

"I can show you his picture," Dolores said, shyly. "He is very handsome." She looked wistfully at her hearer, "He is different from every one else," she exclaimed, low but enthusiastically. In a few moments she had returned with the photograph.

"Yes, he is very good-looking," Miss Russell remarked critically, "he has grown up just as one might have expected, I have not seen him since he was a schoolboy of fifteen. I remember him distinctly then."

"What was he like?" Dolores asked with interest.

"Just like this," touching the photograph, "Tall and fair, with nice curly hair and very pretty grey eyes. He tried to make love to me I remember, which, considering that I was nearly twenty years older than he, showed courage—or presumption, did it not?"

Dolores laughed.

"It was very brave," Miss Russell added, "and so I forgave him the presumption."

That night, after the household had dispersed,

Miss Russell, writing letters in her own room, was disturbed by a low knock.

"Come in."

And in answer to the words the door was opened, and Dolores stood on the threshold.

"Come in, my dear," she said again as she hesitated.

"I wanted to tell you——" she began at once impetuously. "You must have thought me very ungrateful this evening."

"No, I did not—— But never mind, what is it you want to tell me?"

"I am very slow," poor Dolores began, blushing painfully, "it takes me such a long time to think of things to say, but I am not ungrateful. You were very good, you gave me the chance, and——" her voice was trembling, the slight hand nervously touched Miss Russell's strong one. "I have been happy—happier than I thought any one could ever be, and I want to tell you that I thank you for it."

Her dark eyes, softened with the thought of Jerome Shore, were dimmed with tears, the crimson flush on her cheeks, the thick dark plaits of hair that fell over the scarlet dressing-gown below her waist, for the moment struck Miss Russell more than the words themselves.

"She *is* pretty," she thought, with the same semi-maternal pride that had filled Emilie. There was something that appealed to the motherly instinct in woman, in little Dolores, perhaps a reflection

of her sad unappropriated youth, perhaps some tender clinging grace of her own.

She took the girl's hands in her own strong clasp.

"No, Dolores, I did not think you ungrateful. I thought you had made a very good use of the money and the time, which is a great deal better than saying 'Thank you,' and doing nothing. Tomorrow I shall hear you sing—— They tell me you have done wonders, so the poor, fat, cross old Professor was right about your voice—— What an outer barbarian he is—he is as prickly as a porcupine."

"He has a good heart though."

"Yes, he has that," Miss Russell replied, with a laugh. "And, whenever I can stand him no longer, and am going to throw him overboard, out comes his good heart, and I have to make the best of him for another spell! Well, Dolores, it is a pity, as I said, the day he got hold of you, that I did not discover you first, and then you could have lived with me, and you would have been saved the bothers of matrimony. Though, after all, I don't know. Some women," judicially, "*are* better married, and I believe you are one of them. There, good night, go to bed, and to *sleep*, mind," giving her a kiss, "so that you may sing your best in the morning. And remember that, after all, you are my godchild, which is always something."

She did not return to her letter-writing when she was left alone; her own words had awakened memo-

ries of her own life, and for half a minute she wondered if she might not have missed something. She did not know what it might have been, she did not look back to any sentimental story that might have had a different ending. She was a woman without a love-story. Men had proposed to her—several men : some fortune-hunters, who had thought to marry a handsome woman with a good income an easy way of establishing themselves in life ; and others, men who had recognised the “good comrade” in her, and had thought that such comradeship would render life under one roof a very comfortable and easy affair.

She had said “No,” refusing the offer, but clinging quite easily to the friendship, about which there had been no subsequent difficulty.

The man had come to her after a time, passionately in love with some one else, had confided the story to her, accepting her interest as a matter of course, in time bringing his wife, who felt no jealousy,—not even that vague indefinite jealousy of the past which harasses so many wives,—in this friendship with Elinor Russell.

As a rule to overstep conventionality is a mistake, at any rate for women. A man creates the world he lives in ; a woman must either live in the one in which her lot is cast, or leave those she loves behind her. There is a vast difference between making the laws, or having to choose between breaking them and leaving the law-abiding community.

But there always have been, always will be, exceptional people, who have been a law to themselves; those who have recognised the fact that restrictions are made to save the weak, which are not necessary for the strong. "I see so many good things refused," Miss Russell had once said, "because the world is so undisciplined that it cannot enjoy in moderation. It is deplorable to see a man deny himself the glass meant to cheer and hearten him on his journey, because he knows his choice lies between abstinence and drunkenness."

And so, recognising her own strength, she had gone her way, conscious of the strict rectitude of her own life, which feared no light however piercing; only inclined a little to despise the conventionality which other women let rule them, a little inclined to think that where she had succeeded, none need have failed.

But for that half-minute after Dolores's departure there was a wonder if the soft joys of maternity, the wider interests which the young bring into narrow lives, would not have filled some spaces which now required travel and fresh interests to satisfy.

"Well, I wish, poor child," was the result of her cogitations, "that she was not going to marry Virginia Shore's brother. He may be as good as she is bad," with a short laugh. "In which case,"—she paused. "Probably in the one case he does not mean to marry her, and in the other he won't be allowed to! Either way a bad look-out for that trusting, affec-

tionate, little thing up-stairs. However, directly I have handed her over to the Countess Miramar, I will seek out the Shores, and find out the meaning of Virginia's latest peculiarities. I am sure there is something wrong—though, after all," she added, reflectively, "as likely as not she is only amusing herself. But, unfortunately, her amusements are rarely entertaining to other people, and I am not going to have my godchild mixed up in them."

CHAPTER XXX.

“Happiness is like the Echo—it answers, but it does not come.”

THE train had been late, a slow Italian train that had brought them to the unimportant station of Bella Isola. Then had come a long drive to the Countess Miramar's country-house, situated in the midst of the Italian lake district, hidden away in dim-coloured olive-trees, far removed from the ordinary haunts of summer travellers and English-speaking tourists, which was reached at length in darkness, a dark moonless night, a clear sky, with innumerable stars shining down over the still summer landscape. Dolores, overtired and excited, was holding Miss Russell's hand in a tight nervous clasp, when at length the swift black horses stopped before a flight of dimly seen marble steps, and the carriage-door was opened.

All around stillness, saving for the plash of a fountain into a marble basin, and the distant croaking of frogs, and now and then the sigh of the evening wind through the surrounding trees.

Miss Russell, conscious of the fear in the nervous clasp, tightened her hold of the girl's hand, as if to encourage her, and thus encouraging, led her up the marble steps and into a great hall, through which, conducted by a solemn black-clad English butler, they were led to a door at the further end, a door before which hung a heavy curtain. The curtain lifted, they found themselves in a richly furnished room, lit with veiled hanging lamps, which dimly showed the many beauties of art with which the apartment was crowded.

Even to Dolores's anxious mind and ignorant eyes, there was consciousness of the beauty of the pictures, the statues amongst the palms and flowers, the innumerable signs of wealth and taste. But it was only a vague recognition she could give; at the farther end hung another curtain, it was lifted almost immediately, and there appeared the figure of a woman.

Very tall, very beautiful, with smooth black hair twisted in great plaits under a lace mantilla, fastened with diamond pins, long trailing black draperies which made her seem even taller than she was. Such was the woman who now approached. But if there was something awe-inspiring in the gravity of her appearance and dress, there was something else which banished such criticism, on nearer view.

The hair was still black, black as a raven's wing, not a grey hair marred its lustre; but the dark eyes, hollowed and worn with many tears, the thin out-

line of the face, the mouth which had forgotten how to smile, these all told the story of the shadowed life. Once, her young heart had beat proudly as she stood on the threshold of life, filled with the instincts of pride and ambition, which love and happiness and beauty were to fulfil,—and for years she had alternately despaired and rebelled, as she recognised her inability to hold back Fate's destroying hand. She had fought with the energy of a strong nature, and finally had learnt that neither rebellion nor despair holds the secret of peace, which is known only to Renunciation. And now it had come at last. When the strong passions and the grief had alike worn themselves out, now, when life had shaped itself to hardly conquered submission, and religion had at length gained peace for her tried life, now, thus late, was the fruition of joy, indeed to be offered her.

Perhaps the grave worn woman's heart beat even quicker than that of the frightened child. She held out her hand to Miss Russell, but at the same time, the other slender white hand had clasped the girl's, the eyes had turned hungrily, eagerly to the small tired face, whilst she sought to realise how much this moment meant in her empty life.

But as is the way of life, the great moment passed with little emotion to mark it; tired and frightened, Dolores could say nothing, it was Miss Russell's commonplace answers to Countess Miramar's commonplace questions, that filled the moments until

supper was ready. It was a solemn trying meal to all three. Miss Russell's talk was a relief, and almost immediately afterwards bed was the natural ending to a very tiring day.

The Countess took Dolores to her room, and when alone with her, kissed her, and hoped she would sleep well, and rang for her maid to attend to her. And in answer an elderly Englishwoman came.

"We must get a cheerful young woman to wait upon her, Bertha," she said, and she smiled a little; "we are all too old for young people."

And Dolores, in an agony of shyness, looked from one to the other, and stammered out something about always having done everything for herself,—and then could think of nothing else to say, which seemed so unnatural, when she was with her own Mother. The word made her start with a little extra wonder and shrinking from the tall stately woman, who was standing watching her with some untranslatable expression in her beautiful, mournful eyes. Untranslatable to little Dolores, but it found expression by-and-by, as she knelt in the solitude of her own chamber. Found expression first in a passionate pang of disappointment. This was not her little lost daughter, of whom she had thought and prayed all these sixteen years. This nervous shy girl, who had no links with her past, with whom she held no common memory, how could she take the place of the baby, who should have grown to girlhood under her tender, loving

care, who would have known no hour passed away from her unaccounted for, whose life would have been linked with hers in indissoluble union.

She had never thought of it, never feared it,—until she had stood face to face with this stranger,—that such a stretch of bare impassable desert could lie between their two lives.

“There was nothing,—not even——”

She rose from her knees and drew aside a curtain that hung before a picture.

A dark, olive-complexioned man's face smiled down on her,—a beautiful, Southern face, with finely cut features, a red cap on his dark curls, some sweet, haunting smile in the beautiful dark eyes. Was that the face she had half hoped to see again to-night,—that brilliant, Spanish colouring, which she had thought might again gladden her eyes in the lost child!

Ah me!—who can wonder at the pang of disappointment?

Lost father and lost child! Perhaps she had expected relenting Fate was going to give her back both lost treasures, and instead—only a girl, with a white small face, and sweet shy eyes, to take the place of the brilliant beauty into which she had dreamed that Juan Miramar's daughter would grow.

To the girl, it all meant, of course, far less; she was tired, and shy, and frightened; but whilst the lady knelt on, living over and over again each minute of the past, of which this was the consum-

mation, Dolores soon sank into a dreamless slumber, soothed by the splash-plash of the fountain, and the soft murmur of the rustling leaves outside.

It was a shock to her to find that Miss Russell was going to leave the next day. She had always hitherto felt rather nervous with her, but now she seemed the last strong link with the old life. Almost involuntarily her pleading eyes indorsed Countess Miramar's invitation to prolong her visit. But Miss Russell was not to be persuaded. "They will settle down much better if left to themselves," she thought. "After all, nature must have some word in the matter; and when they have got over the strangeness, they will soon become intimate and happy. And besides," she was now in her own room, with the door safely shut behind her, "besides, I should stifle in this atmosphere, if I stayed here much longer. No, thank you," shaking her head, "two meals have been quite enough for me. I don't think for twenty-five years I have paid such a tribute to Conventionality and Decorum; and I am sure I trust it will be twenty-five years more before the necessity occurs again.

"No!" taking up a guide-book. "Now for the first train that will take me to Berlin, and a good talk with the dear, ill-behaved, abusive old Professor! It will be like getting back into a comfortable old smoking-jacket, after sitting for several hours in an exquisitely fitting frock-coat."

She laughed at the idea. "And I am afraid," she

added, "dear old Professor won't see much more of Dolores. I cannot imagine him *vis-à-vis* to the Countess Miramar."

She had a talk with Dolores before she left. "You must always remember, Dolores, that though it was too late, yet I wanted to adopt you too; so if you want an Aunt, or any other kind of relation—English, you know—I daresay you will find out you have all sorts of Spanish Aunts and Uncles,—you must write and tell me, and we will try and settle something."

Poor Dolores! she tried to smile, but she felt very far from smiles; and some words, for which she was striving to find utterance, were very hard to say. And at last it was only the name which reached Miss Russell's ear.

"Captain Shore."

"Well, my dear, I suppose that is all settled, is it not? You must talk to—your Mother about it. Yes, she knows the fact; I told her. But you know you are a baby still,—far too young to be thinking of marriage. Have a little fun first, and postpone housekeeping till you are older."

It was kindly meant advice. Miss Russell was not used to girls; and all sentimentality was so foreign to her nature, that to view the matter except in a prosaic light was impossible.

She did not believe much in Jerome Shore, holding the opinion she did of his sister; and that a girl of sixteen should be married to him, before she had

time to see a little more of the world, seemed to her extremely unwise. Especially as now, under these new circumstances, probably she would be able to see the world under a more favourable light.

“He writes to me.” Dolores’s stammering words, with a question in them, reached her next.

“And I suppose you answer his letters? Well, my advice, Dolores, is—tell it all to *her*. You see, whatever she may be, she has held no authority over your life hitherto; but she is a very good woman, I am sure, and the more you tell her and talk to her, the better it will be.”

Good advice, but Miss Russell felt a little prick as she drove away, at the thought of how very little she would have liked to follow it herself.

“I cannot picture her the recipient of a lover’s woes,” she thought; “and, truth to tell, I am not sure if she will be at all eager for a son-in-law; but of course they must settle all those details between themselves, and the more confidences, the better the chance of their understanding each other.”

Thus it came to pass that Dolores awoke morning after morning in the beautiful house which was now her home, to find that, after all, there is nothing in life so extraordinary but what a few weeks renders it quite natural. She missed Emilie sadly,—her warm sympathy and tender interest in all her interests; her letters were the great element from the old world that found its way into the new.

Following Miss Russell's advice, Dolores told the Countess all about her correspondents; took her letters to her, and told her about their contents. With her the instinct of obedience was so strong, that it never even struck her to disobey. When the first letter came in Jerome's large, unmistakable handwriting, she grew red and white as she lifted her eyes, and saw, or fancied she saw, Countess Miramar's eyes fixed on it.

"This is from Captain Shore," she said, nervously, directly the servant had left the room.

"I have one from him also," the Countess answered. "He writes to ask permission to come and see you."

She added nothing for a few minutes, and then, "Go, Dolores," she said, "and put on a hat. We will walk in the garden; I want to talk to you."

Poor lady. She strove so hard to be just, not to let any faint shadow of jealousy of the past creep into her heart, and yet it was always there, ready to start up into sight.

"If I might only have found her before she had given away her future life; but not only her past, but her future, has been taken out of my hands!"

"What did you call her, that lady who brought you up, and who cared for you when you were little?" she had once asked.

"Mother," Dolores had faltered, her eyes filling with tears at the memory of the home which was still home, and endeared by distance and time.

“Call me Madre, Dolores, will you? it is a soft-sounding Italian word which I like to hear.”

And Dolores obediently called her Madre; glad, too, that a new word had been found for the new situation.

But long self-discipline had taught Countess Miramar to refrain from injustice in words, whatever her sore heart might feel; she was studiously kind, as she and Dolores walked up and down under the linden-trees, talking of Jerome's visit. Studiously kind. She asked all sorts of questions, such as should draw from the girl descriptions of the people she had lived with, and which should help her to piece together the life in which she had held no part; and yet all the time she shrank from it, and wished almost some sea of forgetfulness might overflow, and drown the landmarks.

“She is so very kind to me,” Dolores thought, when she found herself alone, and realised the great happiness that was coming to her with Jerome Shore's visit; “but I do wish I could see Emilie. She is so easy to talk to, she understands so quickly. Of course,” with quick loyalty, “it is because I know her better.” Something Dolores had learnt from sweet-natured, tender-hearted Emilie, that her nature had wanted till they met.

The weakness which had not the courage to fight, which had striven to accommodate itself to two contrary wills, had been unobserved by Dolores's childish eyes, which held some strange power for discern-

ing only the good; from Enilie's ready acts and words of sympathy, which were always forthcoming, which could understand and sympathise with all and every kind of sorrow and joy, Dolores had learnt something which had become part of her nature, some readiness of comprehension, some readiness of expression, which, albeit vaguely, she knew had been previously wanting in her; and it is to our teachers that we are most inclined to be lenient.

Left alone under the lindens, the Countess, repressing that throb of pain brought to her by the thought of the further step which she herself was countenancing—the step that would take the girl further away from her—was wondering over the pain it always causes to allow another to rule his own life, instead of ruling it for him; going over the old arguments in favour of the girl which she had rehearsed so often, and which had helped her to remember that the life had been settled before she had found her, and that it therefore now behoved her to rest content with kindness, which was the only weapon left in the great armoury wherewith most mothers are endowed; pacing up and down, trying to win her heart to calmness and wisdom, and all the time marvelling if it is so ordained, that if, after years, we gain our heart's desire, it must always of necessity prove a disappointment.

“It does seem,” she thought, despairingly, “as if hope were only granted us, to give us sufficient

courage to live—that it is just a mirage—a false presentiment of that which has no reality. And yet,” reproving herself for the doubting thought, “I cannot believe that Infinite Love could create a world on such lines as that.”

To believe in Infinite Love ruling our apparently ill-ruled world, is a great safeguard against despair.

The letters were written and sent; one from Countess Miramar, acknowledging Captain Shore’s, and saying he would be welcome; the other, a short note in Dolores’s childish unformed writing, went by the same post, saying so little, but weighted with some subtle joy which pervaded every ill-arranged sentence, and then there was only to await his arrival.

When he came, it was on a glorious summer day. It had been very hot, and now in the late afternoon, “The ladies had gone into the garden,” the servant told him. “If he would go that way,” leading him through the manifold beauties of the great room, and pointing towards the wide-open glass doors, “he would find them under the trees.”

And Captain Shore, obeying his instructions, passed out into a garden, which seemed to be all alight with pink roses, then through the rose-garden, into a straight walk, bordered on each side by orange-trees, whose perfume made heavy the still air, and so to a stately cedar-tree shadowing a smooth-shaven lawn, under whose thick boughs were chairs, and a table set with tea things, and two ladies.

"Jerome," Dolores exclaimed. It was a very softly uttered word, but hearing it, her companion looked up from her book, and rose at the sight of the advancing stranger.

It was not exactly the man she had expected, that was Countess Miramar's first thought.

True, she had seen his photograph, and listened to Dolores's descriptions, and yet this was not the man they had conjured up; this tall, handsome, fair-haired stranger, who was bowing over her hand, and thanking her for her kindness. Perhaps she had never quite realised what his life was, the position he held at the miniature Court, but face to face with Jerome Shore, prejudice never availed anything, his charm was as undeniable as his good looks, and that nameless *cachet* which perfection of manner can alone bestow.

He was never shy or awkward, or apparently conscious of any difficulty in whatever position he might find himself; his greeting of Dolores was as simple and easy, as if none of these new circumstances had arisen to render it difficult. He did not kiss her, but he took her two hands in his in a caressing fashion, and said her name tenderly.

"Dolly, dear, how are you? though there is no need to ask," and at the words and the kind look that accompanied them, Dolores blushed and smiled. Somehow words did not associate themselves with his child-love—his talk was all with the Countess. At her bidding he drew a chair up beside her in

such a position that his eyes could note Dolores's little face, which was turned towards him; her soft eyes, under the shadow of the wide hat, which so often sought his. He noted approvingly how becomingly she was dressed, in the thick white muslin which suited her girlishness so well.

"Dolores will pour out your tea," the Countess said, "I am sure she knows all about it."

She smiled at the girl as she spoke—one of her grave smiles—and Jerome Shore's kind heart was won at once, it was so evidently the smile of one unused to smiling.

"No one but Dolly," he said, "ever remembers that I like three lumps of sugar—large ones."

To Dolores it was all a dream of bliss; after tea the Countess sent her to walk with Jerome in the scented, beautiful garden, and Jerome, gentle and sympathetic as ever, listened to the story of these past days, and easily drew from her all her hopes and fears.

It was under his direction that they found their way back to the rose-garden, with its high, clipped hedges, which shut it in safely from careless eyes. "And now, Dolly, that we are here, you must give me a kiss," he said, "and tell me you are glad I came."

"You know I am," was her reply.

"Yes, your eyes, which are very pretty, as well as useful, told me that," and he put his arm round her and kissed her. "But you see, Dolly, *she*," lowering

his voice, "might have been an ogre; I had to come and make sure for myself."

"She is very kind to me, and I am not going to school. We are to go to Rome, and I am to have lessons."

"That is far better, don't you think?"

"Yes." The girl sighed.

"What a sigh!" patting the hand on his arm, "what is it?"

"Oh, I am so stupid, I don't seem able to learn anything." She shook her head despondingly.

"Well, never mind. *I* don't mind," Captain Shore replied cheerfully. "I like stupid people," smiling encouragingly; "I daresay it is because I feel more comfortable with them. Now, just fancy the life I should lead if you were like his Excellency, or Virginia! I should soon think life not worth living, and as it is, it is very nice, is it not?"

He took off his soft grey hat and pushed back the fair hair from his forehead, and Countess Miramar, passing through the garden to the house, stopped instinctively, struck with the beauty of face and form, as he stood thus amongst the glowing roses.

At the sight of her he moved towards her, his hand still holding Dolores, and the three entered the dining-room together.

The sun's western rays were flooding the room, lighting up the statues and pictures, and many objects of beauty and interest, and by Countess Miramar's side Jerome wandered from one to another,

listening to her descriptions, asking the intelligent interested questions, which showed the knowledge of a cultured man of the world, and Dolores, a little, slim, white figure, followed them, listening with awe to the readiness and appreciation of Jerome's talk, pleased with reflective pride at the Countess's evident interest. She had never seen her so animated in the weeks they had been together.

She admired her with the childish admiration of a girl for a beautiful woman, but it was not till she heard her talk to Jerome Shore that a faint conception was borne in upon her as to how beautiful, how charming she might have been in those days when she had been one of the most distinguished beauties of her time.

To Jerome Shore she was a great lady, and, in addition, a fascinating, cultivated woman, with a musical voice that it was a delight to listen to, and, over and above all, a woman on whom sorrow had set a certain individual seal. He did not set himself to win her favour, in his visit there had been no thought of self; it had been solely of Dolores he had been thinking, when he set out on his journey; he feigned no interest, he *was* interested, he did not try to win her, he was won himself.

Won through his heart, which was always so swiftly moved to ready comprehension and sympathy with those with whom he found himself.

He had been told the story of Countess Miramar's desolated life; it had been a well-known story at the

time and was easily revived, but it had not made much impression, until he had read it line for line, word for word, in the shadows under the dark eyes, the sad curves of the beautiful mouth.

Dinner was quite a cheerful meal, very animated and lively compared with the silent ones she had known ; so Dolores thought as she listened to Jerome's unembarrassed talk, and noted the Countess's unfeigned interest and attention.

Afterwards, as had become a custom, Dolores sat down to the piano, and in the sweet-scented twilight sang to them. Grave, serious music, such as suited so well her rich young voice ; music, that she had learned in all the perfection of style and taste that only M. Desprez could give.

"She has been beautifully taught," the Countess said, turning to her companion, who was standing silently by her side ; "it is a great gift to have such a voice, and of course it must not be neglected. We remain here till the summer is over, and then she shall have lessons in Rome, where we shall go for the winter."

She had opened the question that had to be discussed, and Jerome felt that it was so. He drew a chair softly towards her, and seated himself, leaning a little forward, his whole attitude indicative of the tender respectful sympathy with which his heart was full. It was easy Justine Miramar found to talk to him ; possibly the fact was partly due to the community of their interests, but when they had

settled Dolores's immediate future, somehow the talk drifted to herself, and her own view of the subject, in a way that to no one else had she yet expressed herself.

"It is too great a gap," she said, sorrowfully; "it is not my little lost baby," smiling sadly, "that has been given back to me."

"No, but a new daughter," he answered, and there was no mistaking the comprehending sympathy of tone and look.

"A dear daughter," she replied, quickly; "she is the sweetest——"

"Yes," Jerome Shore acknowledged, "we all found that out."

They both smiled then, and Dolores stopped singing, and came over and sat beside them. "You look tired," Jerome said to Countess Miramar. He always saw or felt when people were tired or unhappy.

"It has been a hot tiring day," she answered, evasively, but it was not of the heat or the fatigue she was thinking, but wondering what it had been that had attracted this man, with his thousand charms and fascinations, to little Dolores.

Wondered in vain; for only Jerome himself could have told the separate strands that had been so securely woven together.

"Jerome could marry any one," Virginia had often thought, deep down in the silent depths of her heart,

when that future marrying day came before her, and Countess Miramar, on the strength of those first impressions, was inclined to indorse the words, and to wonder.

“He is a very charming gentleman,” she said, as she kissed Dolores for good night, and the tears crowded into the girl’s eyes, and her heart beat quickly with innocent pride as she listened to the words.

For all those two days Jerome remained he was the perfection of a guest; never in the way, and yet always ready to do what either of them might wish. His boyish, happy laugh cheered up the silent house, and his winning, gentle ways endeared him to the Countess.

He found her pathetically beautiful, as he himself described it, and it was no drawback to his walks and talks with Dolores to have this elder, graceful, cultivated woman walking by his side, or reclining on a low chair under the branches of the cedar.

He always saw when her cushions wanted arranging, or if she needed a footstool or a shawl. He was a young man; but to a man of five-and-twenty, when there is no dividing-line of coquetry, there are many meeting-places between him and a woman of seven-and-thirty, and especially such a woman as Justine Miramar.

And Dolores, sitting on a low stool by his side, working or pretending to work, listened with happy

pride to the talk which made cheerful the long, warm afternoon. It was settled, when the visit came to an end, that six months should pass before it was repeated.

"I will take her to Rome," the Countess said. "This dulness and solitude is bad for us. I must grow younger, and take her out into the world. She must have lessons in singing and languages, of course — and other things," she added, vaguely.

"Dancing-lessons, eh, Dolly?" Captain Shore turned to her, "Remember what Virginia said."

"Yes." Dolores looked nervously from the one to the other.

"Yes, of course," the Countess said, only half attending; thinking, thinking — and angry with herself for the thought, which found an answer in the quick, half-jealous words, as Dolores went to the house, and she and Jerome Shore were left alone.

"She has only to learn; she can be taught everything. I never knew such a sweet obedient child."

And then she tortured herself with self-reproach that all Dolores's sweetness, and goodness, and frankness of soul, "for which I should be so thankful," did not suffice; that it annoyed her to recognise her ignorance of ordinary worldly accomplishments; that the loyalty and honesty and truthfulness that looked at her from those

sweet tender eyes, were forgotten often in vexation at little ignorances of custom—"that she cannot even open a fan!"—those nameless, impalpable ignorances, which seemed as if they ought to have been the birthright of Lord Ashton's granddaughter—of Juan, Count Miramar's daughter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“ Full short his journey was ; no dust
Of earth unto his sandals clave.”

THE autumn, passed amongst the roses and olives, was over, and Countess Miramar and Dolores had taken up their residence for the winter in the great house in Rome, which had been Justine's lonely home for so many years. Poor Justine ! It seemed to her soul, grown nervous with overmuch watching and tending, that she was being punished in some indefinite way, which she could not, or would not, put into words, for—— For what ? Ah ! it does not do to begin criticising and explaining life too much even to ourselves. Deep down in the dark earth is hidden the secret of the future flower,—no earthly hand can prevent its blossoming into that which the hidden seed held. It does not do in our ignorance to decide what are punishments, even for ourselves,—they are results, and that must suffice.

“ Did I despair too long ? Did I rebel ? ” Justine Miramar asked herself, as she knelt those long hours in chapel, “ and is that the reason, that even now I

am not satisfied? Though I fear,"—with nervous anxiety, clasping her thin hands,—“to admit it!” Deep down in her heart, scarcely recognised, but still there,—the terror, that if she were not satisfied, there were heavier bolts yet that might be hurled against her tried life.

To the onlooker, so often the saddest part of a great fight is, that the fighter, even if he survive, is too much hurt, or too tired, to care for that for which he fought. The struggle has destroyed the capacity for enjoyment.

Justine Miramar did not look at results, and compare them honestly with causes, and decide that time alone could mend what time had broken, and that one day, even their divided lives might grow together again; neither did she trust, as gentler, more confiding souls might have done, and have found comfort therein,—that perhaps what we judge to be unmitigated evil, is the highest good of which we were then capable;—she only felt that somehow life's promise had once again failed her, and strove all the harder, that no shadow of the failure should touch any one else.

“She is the sweetest child,” she said a hundred times a-day, noting her obedience and gentleness and anxiety to please. And then in the cold silent chapel would reproach herself that this did not fill her empty heart.

But if it did not fill, it created a new round of interests such as she had not known for years,

although the impatient human longing was not satisfied with that community of interests, which brought them hourly, daily, nearer together.

"I want a Miracle," the woman cried, her heart full of the great store of undemanded mother's love, and failed to note that the miracle was being slowly wrought, day by day, and hour by hour.

"I will have no school, no governess even," she had jealously decided. "She shall be always with me, learn from me—there shall be nothing, nothing to divide us."

So there were professors and lessons, and much music, and tranquil as the life was, some long-missing brightness of youth found its way into the gloomy old house.

Once a-week, the Countess was in the habit of receiving a few friends to dinner, and a few more who came in afterwards,—and these receptions recommenced shortly after they had taken up their abode in the city.

Strive as she might to hide it, Justine Miramar was feverishly nervous as the first of these evenings approached. The story of course was well known in Rome, had been of course well discussed; she knew the many eyes that would be ready for criticism.

She was angry with herself for caring what her world should say or think, and yet was conscious that it was that very point of view, of the world beyond her own four walls, that she was thinking of.

“And that is so unmotherly,” she felt, with a sad smile.

And the knowledge of the thought put her on her guard, as she swept down-stairs,—a regal-looking woman, in her velvet gown, diamonds in her smooth black hair and round her throat, and met Dolores in the flower-filled drawing-room. Such a slight graceful Dolores, all in white, with a tiny wreath of jasmine on her small head, and some childish, anxious look in her eyes, meeting which, the Countess stooped and kissed her.

“Yes, you look very nice, Dolores.” She had not drifted into calling her by the more familiar abbreviation, — and reproached herself more than ever that there should always be that slight shadow of disappointment.

It was useless expecting Dolores to talk; of that, at any rate for the present, she despaired. Of course she was young; but at sixteen she had known many girls who had plenty to say for themselves, “But that is a trifle,” she thought impatiently, “it is far better she should be silent, than noisy.” She was always in the attitude, she recognised bitterly,—as she followed her guests in to dinner,—of taking the part of advocate for the girl, against herself. “And she does not need it.”

“The gentleman, Dolores, with whom I am going to send you in to dinner, was a friend of— I have known him many years,” she finished hastily; and Dolores frightened and blushing, found herself,

with her hand on the arm of a tall, soldierly, grey-haired man, who was looking at her earnestly, but yet not in a way to alarm her.

He looked at her a great deal; sometimes intently, sometimes cautiously, as they crossed the hall to the dining-room, but when they were seated at table, he began to talk, and in a few minutes, Dolores had forgotten her shyness, the blush had faded, and the soft, sweet eyes were fixed on his with flattering eagerness.

"I want you to take her in to dinner, Carlos. You are a bachelor, so it does not matter what I do with you! She is very silent,—but you must remember she is young and very shy,—and you must love her."

"Juan was my dear brother," the man replied,—"you were *his* wife,—you are my sister,—I do not think you need plead with me."

"I am only over-anxious, I suppose."

And after all, there seemed no cause to be anxious. The Countess, looking in their direction constantly, saw no painful pauses and fluttering nervousness, such as she had feared, which might vex the man who sat by her.

"You found her silent?" she questioned afterwards; there was, to the man who knew her so well, an anxious note in the voice.

"I found her," he said kindly, "a charming listener, which is by far the best to be hoped from a girl of sixteen."

“And you are not disappointed?” she faltered.

“Ah, Justine,” he answered, “why should I be disappointed! She is pretty, and modest, and frank, and honest; no one could have an ugly soul behind those sweet eyes, it seems to me there is little more left to ask for.” “Poor woman,” he thought as he left her, “she has had a lot of lessons set her, and yet has not mastered much of life yet. She has fought, and struggled, and wrestled with Fate, and believed that the Church had taught her calmness, when rebellion had at length given place to despair. And now that she has her heart’s desire, the shrine is not filled after all! ‘Om mani padmé houn!’ which I suppose to mean that there is a Jewel in the Lotus, or perfection somewhere. It certainly is as well to look pretty high up for it!”

“Poor child, as well,” was his next thought as he made his way up to where she stood, awaiting the summons to the piano. She was always glad to sing. She was not embarrassed or shy then; it was talking to all these strangers she dreaded, where every word tended to betray her ignorance, and increase her discomfort. She was glad to see her friend of the dinner-table approaching her, “If only, if only Jerome had been here!” The memory even of him, and the many occasions on which he had befriended her, brought a tender wistfulness to her soft dark eyes, that the approaching stranger did not fail to note.

“And she *is* pretty,” he thought, “tenderly, sweetly pretty;—not a beauty,” and he sighed. “Poor Justine, she is such a good woman that she will do penance for only thinking it!—but in itself, that fact is a bitter disappointment.”

When Dolores sang, the talk was hushed, and the little unnoticeable daughter of the house attracted the attention of all. She had no tricks of manner or attitude to distract from the pure notes which filled the room, and floated away,—like some sweet bird’s song,—into the distance. She might be deficient in dramatic power,—perhaps some day the hour might come when some personal emotion might unlock deeper mysteries unsounded as yet,—but apart from that, there was the perfection of training to set her beyond and above her peers.

Some responsive pride flushed the Countess’s cheeks, as those around poured forth their praise and admiration, but hers sought those of her brother-in-law. He was standing beside the piano, holding the girl’s hands, pouring out in kindest words his appreciation and pleasure.

“I am so glad to please you,” Dolores answered shyly,—“I have had every chance, you know; through the kindness of my friends, I was taught by M. Desprez.”

“You could not have had a better teacher, so I’m told. Were you long with him?”

“Nearly two years. Madre does not wish me

to sing anything except the music I learnt with him," she explained, "and it is not very suitable for a drawing-room."

"Do not change—do not change," the man replied.

"Ah, Justine, what a voice!" He sought out the mother afterwards. "You must forgive her," and he smiled, "everything else she needs for the sake of that voice."

"What does she need?" the Countess asked. Her voice was quiet and unmoved, but he had known her too long and well not to know or guess the hidden anxiety.

"It is the *mother*," he answered calmly, "who puts that question; the old uncle is satisfied." And Countess Miramar made no reply.

On the whole, those were happy weeks to Dolores that passed now. "Every one was always kind to her," she said. She had lessons of all sorts; did she ever express a wish it was granted—though this was not often the case, because, to one brought up on the lines on which Dolores had made acquaintance with the world, the instincts which prompted her to believe all things impossible of attainment, were too strong to be combated at once. It never struck her to wish for things, still less to ask for them.

She lived her gentle life by the Countess's side—a certain sweet unswerving attention to her duties marking her daily life; otherwise, little to attract

the attention of any one about her. She went into the world a good deal,—this was by the Countess's wish,—and though she often felt shy and uncomfortable, she gained a great deal of pleasure, which no one seeing her would ever have guessed.

She learnt to dance, and was chosen as a partner by many of the dancing men. They made a little conversation, to which she found it almost impossible to reply. Her stock of trivial talk was limited; she was not a reader, she knew nothing of the world: it seemed impossible to find any topic on which she could venture a word.

Men danced with her for her mother's sake—for other reasons, perhaps, as well. She was young and pretty enough, and there was a certain interest attaching to her; but the one waltz accomplished, they did no more, wished for nothing more. They shrugged their shoulders, and went their way and sought out brighter, livelier partners; and Dolores spent the greater part of her evening with Count Carlos and his elderly friends.

“To talk to them was so much easier,” she thought; or, perhaps, was it—although she did not know it herself—that with them she only listened!

Her letters to and from Emilie were a source of great pleasure. To her she told everything about this new life she was living, feeling sure of that warm loving interest and sympathy which she had learnt to rely on. She was more excited than the Countess had ever seen her, when the news came in

a letter, written in Charles Desprez's large well-formed hand, of the birth of Emilie's little daughter.

"You who were with me in all those terrible months of loneliness, can understand what I feel to-day. Emilie is well, wonderfully well; and the baby is—well, like all babies, though, of course, not in her mother's eyes, who thinks her something quite especial. I hope, dear Dolly, that one day you will return to Ingelheim and see her. I am writing this in the library, where we have so often sat together, and where your presence was such a comfort to me when everything seemed darkest. Well, the light has come again, and Emilie and I are once more, as of old, everything to each other! Some day, perhaps, I shall have cause to be jealous of the baby, but not yet; for, as you may have heard, her husband is dead,—he is dead, so I will not say a word more; but looking at all the pain and trouble and sorrow my poor Emilie has known, I cannot help thinking that if children would only trust us more, how much sorrow we could save them."

It was a beautiful letter, Dolores thought. When she had cried a little over it, she took it to the Countess, and somewhat timidly asked if she would like to read it; then she wrote a great many of her girlish, loving, not very well expressed epistles to Emilie, to sympathise with her, as she lay with her baby in her arms, the one comfort left out of those short months in which she had essayed to secure a life for herself.

But after all, sad as it was under the circumstances, this death of poor Antoine was scarcely a shock. He had lingered on under M. Desprez's roof much longer than even the doctor had hoped for; the curtained doorway had become almost a separate house, into whose secrets M. Desprez never inquired, as he drove away day after day in his smart little brougham to the opera-house, which was the centre of his joys.

The season once again was at its height; the Princess, always a little languid now, her cheeks certainly less rounded, her colouring more delicate, and a shadow under her brilliant eyes, which now and again lent them a softer dreamier look than of old. But she was prouder than ever, so people said; and those whose duty it was to amuse and interest her, found it harder to accomplish, and withal, perhaps, she was more desirous of amusement.

His Excellency watched her, and talked to her, and then turned, with what was like a sigh of relief, to Virginia Shore's caustic speeches and swift malicious criticisms.

No; there was certainly something wrong in the air of the miniature Court.

"Perhaps electricity," his Excellency thought. "Miss Shore," smiling in the darkness, as he drove home through the frosty night, "is, I am sure, a mass of electricity; and it keeps one nervous, for fear something or some one passing should receive a shock."

"Which is best, I wonder?"—he had reached his own room now, and was standing in the lamp-light,—"to have converted your heart by scientific processes into brain, as Virginia has done, and thus, at small cost, taken a good step towards an excellent digestion, which is the way to foster talent, or——" he paused. "Well, I suppose there are other ways of avoiding the usual Fate. But it is not avoiding it," he spoke aloud, with most unusual passion in his tones; and, turning the key in a desk, took thence an old-fashioned photograph of a man in a splendid fur-trimmed uniform, upright and tall—the pride of youth and strength in the eyes that met his own.

"She chose you," he said, more quietly; "she loved you best, I suppose, the only woman for whom I have ever cared; and in a couple of years she had followed you to a cruel grave. The boy is like you," he laid the picture down, and took up a photograph that had lain beside it—the same face, at sight of which Dolores had once started in anxious self-betrayal; "he is like you. Yes, but he has his mother's eyes—the same shadowy, haunting sorrow in them, which it needed only time to give the cause for. His mother's heart, and his father's impetuous passionate nature, what chance had he? Those sort of men," he smiled, but the fingers trembled that locked the pictures away from sight, "should really never fall in love. What a fool I am!" he added, angrily. "When one has arrived at the age when

one is haunted, one should be careful not to open unused cupboards, or one runs the risk of coming upon ghosts. And the ghosts are all so carefully locked away that it is only a fool who need run the risk of being worried by them."

But fighting Fate, and locking up ghosts, and settling our own lives are, after all, only words; there is something further always to be taken into account—one card, when perhaps we hold all the others, but none the less likely for that to upset our best-laid plans. One cannot guard one's self at all quarters. Everything may promise fairly, and yet—may come the bolt out of the blue. And especially does it not do to wage war with Fate. She is a woman, a wary cruel woman, and has a deceitful way of watching for a weak undefended spot, at the very moment that, tired out, we think the warfare is accomplished, and we may assuredly lay our weapons down, and steal a little well-deserved rest: it almost seems as if she always keeps back one especially selected arrow for that moment of weakness.

The next day, one of those cloudless days of frost and sunshine, of which winter is so niggardly, was dedicated to skating on a lake some miles away; and the Princess, though she had refused to skate herself, had promised to drive over and see the scene, which was brilliant enough.

"Though you despise such amusements," she had said to his Excellency the previous evening, "this is

uncommon enough to be worth looking at; you will come, I am sure."

So through the keen cold air the Princess, his Excellency by her side, drove that afternoon. No man can remain quite unmoved by a woman's beauty, however much he may essay to argue with himself that beauty is no condonation for the acts he disapproves; nevertheless, for all he thinks and says, it does hold in its gift some scarcely acknowledged excuse.

The Princess, all in white, white furs round her throat, a white fur cap on the thick twists of her wonderful hair, her eyes blue as sapphires, the delicate colour burning on her cheeks that the cold north wind had brought,—his Excellency found himself reluctantly admitting the excuse. Reluctantly feeling that such beauty was a power of which it was impossible to judge the full import.

"She misused it," he thought, even as he answered her talk, which was all of the day's amusement, which nominally was held in honour of Prince Adelbert, who was once more a guest at the Palace.

"She misused it; she did not do it ignorantly or carelessly, but of set purpose. To gain his devotion, admiration, love,—what did she care what he felt, as long as he showed his weakness, and thus proved her strength?"

Did his thoughts affect hers? How had the talk dropped? What had led to the silence which he

felt had preceded the words he was now listening to—words so quietly and clearly spoken.

“Excellency, where is Prince Lescynski?”

“In Egypt, Princess.” He was almost surprised that his own voice, to his ear at least, betrayed none of the emotion that beset him.

“What did she mean?—what was her object in speaking the name which, for so many, many months, had never been spoken between them?”

She was looking down now at the great white fur muff on her knees, playing with the bunch of hyacinths fastened into the front of her coat; but she *had* been looking at him, even if she were now avoiding his eyes.

When that question had been spoken, her eyes, with some expression which he had not had time to read, had been fixed on his.

“There seems to be a great deal of trouble there.” She hazarded the words as if expecting an answer.

“You are right, Princess,” he rejoined, significantly, “a great deal of trouble. Between fever and fighting, it will be hardly won glory,”—he paused a second, almost imperceptibly,—“or forgetfulness to the survivors.”

Had she heard? She gave no sign if it were so, did not turn her head, or make any comment.

“That is the worst of women,” his Excellency thought angrily,—for it is angering not to know whether your stab has been felt or not. “They lead you on to commit indiscretions, and then merely

make you feel that they despise you for falling into the trap."

But the study of diplomacy is, at any rate, a good one for showing you short and easy ways out of traps. The climate of Egypt is as good a topic of conversation as any other; and a few minutes later they had approached the lake, and were watching with pleasure the pretty sight.

"I am not going to skate," the Princess had said. "I am not good enough," she told his Excellency; "but I should like to walk round the lake before I return home."

Prince Adelbert had taken off his skates, and now drew near, and proposed that he should accompany her. She accepted the proposal, and with a smile turned away with him.

The owner was from home, the house was shut up, but in a pretty well-warmed summer-house there were coffee and refreshments, and in that direction they wended their way.

For a minute his Excellency stood watching them. "Is that to be the end of it? Has she made up her mind at last? I should not wonder! She may have realised that this"—vaguely—"will not last for ever, and that the assured reign of a Princess Adelbert would be better worth having. Softened or hardened, as the case may be, by the decision, it is possible she meant to say something about *him*,—hence the question. I am afraid"—drily—"my answer was not conducive to expansiveness. But

she deserved it—a cruel, heartless woman ;” but something pleaded for her, even as he spoke, and his eyes involuntarily turned from Miss Shore, whose light graceful motions he had been watching with infinite pleasure, to the white-clad figure now on the opposite shore of the lake.

The short winter’s day soon drew to a close, the night was very cold, and directly it became dusk, the party began to think of returning.

The Princess left early, not skating, it was cold standing about. Passing Virginia, who had taken off her skates, and was talking of returning also, she stopped and spoke to her.

“Tired ?” she questioned, with a half-note of wonder in her voice, and a half-grudging admiration, looking at the girl as she stood there in her sables, so alert and brilliant and graceful, with such vivacity and enjoyment of life in every note of her voice, of which no slightest inflection ever failed to reach the listener,—every glance of the clear eyes, which always seemed to see what was visible to no one else.

“Tired ! no !” Virginia answered lightly ; “but one must look forward, and there is the dance to-night to prepare for. I should not like to think I should not look my best.”

The elderly greybeard, who was the Prince’s chosen friend, was standing by her side. “You need not fear,” he said gravely, and Virginia laughed.

"What is it you are looking forward to, Miss Shore?" his Excellency asked, drawing near. "Your words of wisdom attracted my attention. To look forward and prepare, is generally not a quality we expect to find in women."

"Ah! but I am a rare woman," Virginia returned.

His Excellency lifted his hat in recognition of the fact.

"Virginia," the Princess interposed, in her low, peculiar voice, "if you are not tired when you return home, will you come to see me? There are several things about the Concert I wish to ask you."

She bowed to them all when she had spoken, and stepped into her carriage, driving away alone. His Excellency was to return with Prince Adelbert.

"Rare things are costly," he thought to himself, as he noted Virginia and her companion walking away together, but it was not only of her he was thinking, "All the world knows that, of course; but the price asked and obtained," he added bitterly, "seems to me very inadequate and unsatisfactory."

On her arrival at the Palace, Virginia went straight to the boudoir of the Princess. Until she entered the room,—which was empty,—she had not given a thought to the why or wherefore of her visit. A concert was in course of preparation, and there was much talk in reference to it. And whenever there was anything to be done, it was natural to consult Virginia, who always had ideas on all

such subjects. She stood for a moment in doubt, at finding no one, but even as she hesitated, the Princess's voice called softly, "Virginia," from the conservatory beyond, and as she spoke, she appeared in the doorway.

She had changed her driving dress for a long loose gown of faint cream colour, and her red-gold hair hung in two thick plaits, nearly reaching the floor, in the fashion, customary with her, when in her own rooms. She said the weight of the coils made her head ache, a reasonable supposition enough, but there may possibly have been a touch of vanity in addition.

Virginia Shore, in her dark velvet skating dress, with its rich sables, was a striking contrast.

"Sit down, Virginia," the Princess seated herself as she spoke, "though I fear I have not chosen a very good moment. You wanted to rest before the evening, I know."

"Oh, I am not tired truly. It was as good an excuse as any other; I had skated enough," she added. "It is unwise to do any one thing for long together—one *might* grow tired."

The Princess smiled.

"And you are never unwise," she said.

"Don't flatter me, please, or I shall probably prove my flatterer wrong by committing an extravagance,—and I don't want to," she said more earnestly.

After that, they talked of the concert and the other entertainments prepared in Prince Adelbert's

honour; but as Virginia's shrewd mind swiftly grasped, behind all the talk, there was nothing which was of sufficient importance to have necessitated this interview, at an hour too when the Princess was generally alone, especially when the evening held some entertainment.

But though the time passed in this apparently trivial talk, there was no hint of dismissal.

Once the Princess said vaguely, "Do you not find the room warm with all those furs?" and in obedience to the suggestion, Virginia had unfastened her coat, and the Princess had immediately added, as if to preclude the idea of departure, some further question, and Virginia saw that she was not intended to go. "It is a pity," she said next, "that instead of a very ordinary concert, Antoine Lütz's work is not ready." And as the Princess looked at her interrogatively, "Did you not know," Virginia went on, "that when he died, he left some manuscript work behind him, with a request to his wife that by some means or other, she should get it heard? And that Emilie has prevailed upon dear papa to have it produced at the Opera House."

And as the Princess shook her head, "Poor Emilie," Virginia continued, "she believes in it of course, because it is Antoine's last will and testament; and Papa Desprez does not, for the very same reason. 'And Emilie cried, and that was so worrying, and made me ill, you know—and reminded me of things that I had quite forgotten—and after all,

one does not live in this nice, warm, comfortable world to be made unhappy—and I—Charles Desprez, am rich and powerful, and successful enough to be able to afford my dear only daughter something;—especially if she won't cry,—or remind me of things.' And so," with a sudden change of tone, "it is settled. Papa Desprez pays expenses, the theatre is given up one afternoon in summer, and Antoine's work makes its appearance once, and once only on any stage."

The Princess laughed, but the laugh was followed by a sigh. "Poor Madame Lütz! I hope, she, at any rate, will not be disappointed. What is it?"

"It is an Orchestral Symphony, I believe, and Dolores,—you remember the little English girl,—is most enthusiastic, and only wishes she could have sung the soprano."

"It is true, is it not," was the Princess's comment, "that Captain Shore is engaged to her?"

"So they say," Virginia answered, quietly—there was a second's pause—"but on marrying and giving in marriage," she added, "I feel incompetent to give an opinion."

At the words the Princess said, "But he is surely very much in love? You told me so," she added, a trifle uncomfortably.

"I don't believe in love," Virginia answered immediately, in her swift incisive tones, lifting her clear eyes to where the slight colour had risen in

her listener's cheeks. And the Princess's eyes shifted, and the nervous colour deepened.

Conscious perhaps of those eyes, the Princess half rose, and Virginia stood up at once, taking it as a sign of permission to retire.

"What is the subject of M. Lütz's Symphony,—do you know?" the Princess asked, as if clutching at some impersonal subject, which should make these last moments easier.

"I believe,—it is a great secret,—but I have a knack," and Virginia laughed, "of finding out secrets,—that it is founded on the story of the 'Grey Lady.'"

The delicate flickering colour was burning steadily now, and Virginia noted it. "It is romantic and dramatic enough," she went on, lightly, "and full of love, which of course is advisable on the stage, if inconvenient off it."

"Virginia,"—the Princess spoke as if her thoughts had wandered whilst the other was speaking,—"I saw just now that there are several yellow roses in bloom; if you like you shall have them for to-night."

"That is very kind," Virginia answered, as the Princess, a little hurriedly, took up a pair of scissors, and preceded her guest into the soft-scented semi-darkness of the conservatory.

"They suit you," the Princess said, as she began recklessly cutting the many golden-yellow flowers with which the tree was covered.

For a moment—silence, except for the splash of the fountain; darkness, saving for the soft-shaded lamp that swung overhead.

“You receive English papers, Virginia, don’t you?” The voice was quite steady, the eyes were lifted to the flower she was cutting.

“Yes.” Virginia’s reply was a trifle wondering.

“It would be very kind of you, if you would send them to me.” The speaker’s face was no longer averted; she was bending over the roses she held, arranging them and studying their number and appearance. “They are better than German papers, they tell so much more. German papers,” lifting the roses, and inhaling their fragrance, “are rather scanty——”

“About English matters, yes,” Virginia assented, quietly, as if it were the natural ending to the sentence.

She was on the alert now, though wherefore she could hardly have told; but the visit and the subsequent silence had puzzled her, and it annoyed her to be puzzled.

“The English papers are full of Egypt at present,” she said, a moment after, “they contain nothing else. I suppose that is natural, as it is the topic of the hour—to the *English*.”

She paused, and took the roses from the hand that held them.

“Thank you, Princess,” she said, “you are kind and generous. I will wear them with pleasure;

they are a lovely colour, and a becoming colour. Thank you again; and I will send the papers in return," she said, tranquilly. "I get a great many just now. Jerome sends them to me; like the English, he can think of little else, but then that is natural, as Prince Lescynski, his greatest friend, is there."

Had the carefully avoided name slipped out through an indiscretion, or of malice-prepense?

It was hard to say. Having made the slip, if it were a slip, Virginia Shore was not a woman to stumble vainly in attempts to free herself from the results. There was not a shadow of embarrassment in the clear grey eyes that looked so steadily into that other woman's face, across which the shifting shadows from the lamp, softly swinging overhead, alternately revealed and betrayed so much.

The fountain splashed on—for an almost imperceptible second the only sound—but the voice was still steady as, "Where is Prince Lescynski?" the Princess asked.

"If he is still alive," Virginia answered, deliberately, "I suppose he is fighting fever or Arabs in Egypt."

There was the sound of one quick-drawn breath, but there was no change in the voice that came out of the half-darkness.

"Why do you say, *if* he is still alive?—do you know that he has been ill?"

"Yes, very ill, so Jerome told me; but he has not written lately."

They were walking side by side now, back to the boudoir.

"You must go now, Virginia," the Princess said, "and get some well-deserved rest, or I am afraid you will blame me, if you do not look your best to-night."

"Ah, well, it is safer to run no risks," Virginia lightly replied; "one never can tell," with one of her swift amused smiles, "what may depend on looking one's best."

"So that was it," she thought, when alone in her own room, and she gave vent to the words, standing in front of her father's picture. "What extraordinary beings women are! All that wariness, and duplicity, and dulness, and discomfort, to secure two or three papers which she only had to ask for out loud before the whole world. I am thankful for many things," she concluded, reflectively, "but most of all that I do not easily blush. There is nothing makes women so nervous and uncomfortable as the knowledge that that may befall them. They may not, but then again they may, so they are never sure, and consequently always ill at ease. But I am glad, all the same, to have discovered what the mystery was—a trifle—but it is not pleasant to be baffled, even in trifles."

Yes, surely that was going to be the end of it,

the end of all the doubt and hesitation which had harassed the matrons of Ingelheim, when the Princess, who so rarely danced, stood up and opened the ball with Prince Adelbert.

The eyes which see so much, and the voices which whisper and know, before there is anything to be known, were noting and whispering to-night, and deciding how wise it would be to assure the certainty, and drop the shadow, which must go one day, for the substance, of which no one could deprive her. Mothers, with young daughters of their own, looked on and applauded and admired the marriage they foresaw of this young, brilliant, beautiful woman with the elderly grey-headed man, who might so easily have been her father.

A difference in age, perhaps, but so much to make up for that; and, after all, she was not a girl, she had made a good wife to an old man before this.

Possibly there was foundation for the whispers with which the air was rife; possibly that marked favour shown to her guest, those smiles with which those restless vivid eyes did not accord, were known and recognised by the Princess herself to be the first step on that road along which she knew she was setting forth. If she could have accomplished her own desire, doubtless she would have smiled more often, and kept out of her sea-blue eyes that look that was a reflection of despair; but, unlike Virginia Shore, her face was the ready mirror of all that she fain would have hidden. Years of undisciplined

expression of good and ill alike is not to be combated and overcome in a day.

"Nothing really can satisfy a woman, a beautiful woman," she said, as she stood alone that night before the mirror which had seen the veil lifted that hid the 'Grey Lady,' and had known the wild despair of that night's resolution; "nothing really can satisfy but gratified ambition. It is within my grasp,—I mean to take, to seize it."

"Of course," as if answering some inward voice, "one must be happy too; but," with sudden fierceness, "*I will* be happy." And all the time Fate hovering by, with the last arrow in the quiver grasped in her hand, and the bow drawn to its utmost tension.

The next day, the Princess, in her white furs, drove alone,—it was not often the little serious yellow-haired son was not by her side,—and the day after he was still absent.

Some childish ailment, children run down so quickly, and with such a child one cannot be too careful; and then a day, and other days following, when the Princess was not seen either, and it was only known that she could not leave him.

Then hasty agonised telegrams, which brought help and advice to assist the doctor, who had known the child all his short life; and a cessation of gaiety and departure of guests, and anxious faces everywhere.

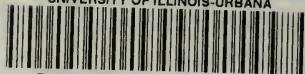
Only a few short days since the Princess, ponder-

ing and wondering, had striven to veil her doubts and fears in careless smiles, as she met old Prince Adelbert's admiring looks; and now only a broken-hearted mother, haggard and worn, kneeling by a little quiet child, his blue eyes closed, and small hands clasped, his proud eager life ended,—Fate's last arrow sped.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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